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# THE NEW YORKER





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# THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 9, 2015

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**ERIC SCHLOSSER** ("BREAK-IN AT Y-12," P. 46) is the author of "Fast Food Nation" and "Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety."

**JEFFREY TOOBIN** (COMMENT, P. 27) has written six books, including "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court" and "The Oath: The Obama White House and the Supreme Court."

**PETER HESSLER** ("TRAVELS WITH MY CENSOR," P. 34), a staff writer for the magazine, spent eleven years in China. "Strange Stones: Dispatches from East and West" is his latest book.

**JOHN MCPHEE** ("FRAME OF REFERENCE," P. 42) is a longtime *New Yorker* contributor. He has published twenty-eight books, including "Silk Parachute."

**PHILIP LEVINE** (POEM, P. 62) began contributing poems to the magazine in 1958, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1995 for his collection "The Simple Truth." He died last month, at the age of eighty-seven.

**STEPHEN KING** (FICTION, P. 76), whose first story for the magazine, "The Man in the Black Suit," appeared in 1994 and earned an O. Henry Award, has a new novel, "Finders Keepers," coming out in June.

**KATHRYN SCHULZ** (BOOKS, P. 90), the author of "Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error," recently joined *The New Yorker* as a staff writer.

**EMILY NUSSBAUM** (ON TELEVISION, P. 96) is the magazine's television critic and the winner of the 2014 National Magazine Award for columns and commentary.

**BIRGIT SCHÖSSOW** (COVER) is working on the illustrations and the text for two books, which will be published next year. She lives near Hamburg.

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##### ALSO:

**DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT:** Opinions and reflections by Joan Acocella, Jeffrey Toobin, and others.

**VIDEO:** The Moth and *The New Yorker* celebrate the magazine's ninetieth anniversary with a night of stories from David Remnick, Larissa MacFarquhar, and others.

**THE SPORTING SCENE:** Our blog covering the world of sports.

**PODCASTS:** On the Political Scene, Jeffrey Toobin and Ryan Lizza join Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion about the backlash in Congress and the courts regarding the President's immigration policy. Plus, Kelefa Sanneh, Sarah Larson, and David Haglund on Out Loud.

**HUMOR:** A Daily Cartoon on the news, drawn by Emily Flake. Plus, the Shouts & Murmurs blog.

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# THE MAIL

## PSYCHEDELIC MEDICINE

In reporting on the use of psychedelic drugs to treat cancer and other pathologies, Michael Pollan could have turned his attention to more critical studies ("The Trip Treatment," February 9th). In my work as a psychiatrist, I have read research on psilocybin—the active ingredient in "magic mushrooms"—that is at odds with the benign outcomes he mentions in his piece. In a 2013 article in the *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, the psychopharmacologist Robin Carhart-Harris proposed that psilocybin-induced brain changes could be used "as a model of early psychosis." This fits with another study, by Franz X. Vollenweider, from 1998, in which he reported a schizophrenia-like psychosis lasting about two hours in twenty-five healthy volunteers after they were given psilocybin. In many cases, the volunteers who participate in psychedelic research have a history of using hallucinogenic drugs. Participants in the Carhart-Harris study had used psilocybin an average of sixteen times. In a study of cancer patients conducted by Charles S. Grob in 2011, eight out of twelve test subjects had used hallucinogens in the past. No one wants to deprive desperate cancer patients of the opportunity for a better quality of life, but there are far too many questions about the safety of psilocybin to promote its use.

*Charles E. Dean, M.D.*  
*Apple Valley, Minn.*

Pollan's article about using psychedelics in medical treatments offers a sad commentary on how government funding for scientific research is influenced heavily by political and cultural values that are unrelated to science. With few exceptions, federal support for research on so-called drugs of abuse has taken into consideration only their adverse effects, reinforcing the bias of policymakers and funders. As a former director of the White House Office of Drug Abuse Policy, I now feel a sense of shame at having failed to try to re-

verse the Nixon-Ford policy that placed most psychedelics on the D.E.A.'s Schedule 1 list, prohibiting their use. Congress would almost certainly have blocked this change, but had we been able to lift the ban on scientific research into medical applications, doctors would probably now have a far better understanding of brain function, and the unnecessary suffering of many terminally ill patients could have been alleviated. We should applaud the heroic scientists and clinicians Pollan mentions, who are clearly committed to advancing the frontiers of science.

*Peter G. Bourne, M.D.*  
*Spotsylvania, Va.*

## ELEGANT EQUATIONS

As Alec Wilkinson points out in his Profile of the math genius Yitang Zhang, results in pure mathematics can be sources of wonder and delight, regardless of their applications ("The Pursuit of Beauty," February 2nd). Yet applications do crop up. Nineteenth-century mathematicians showed that there are geometries as logical and complete as Euclidean geometry, but which are utterly distinct from it. This seemed of no practical use at the time, but Albert Einstein used non-Euclidean geometry to make the most successful model that we have of the behavior of the universe on large scales of distance and time. Abstract results in number theory, Zhang's field, underlie cryptography used to protect communication on devices that many of us use every day. Abstract mathematics, beautiful in itself, continually results in helpful applications, and that's pretty wonderful and delightful, too.

*David Lee*  
*Sandy Spring, Md.*

*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto:themail@newyorker.com). Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.*

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Charles Coypel, *Don Quixote at Don Antonio Moreno's Ball* (detail), 1731, oil on canvas, Palais Impérial de Compiègne, photo: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

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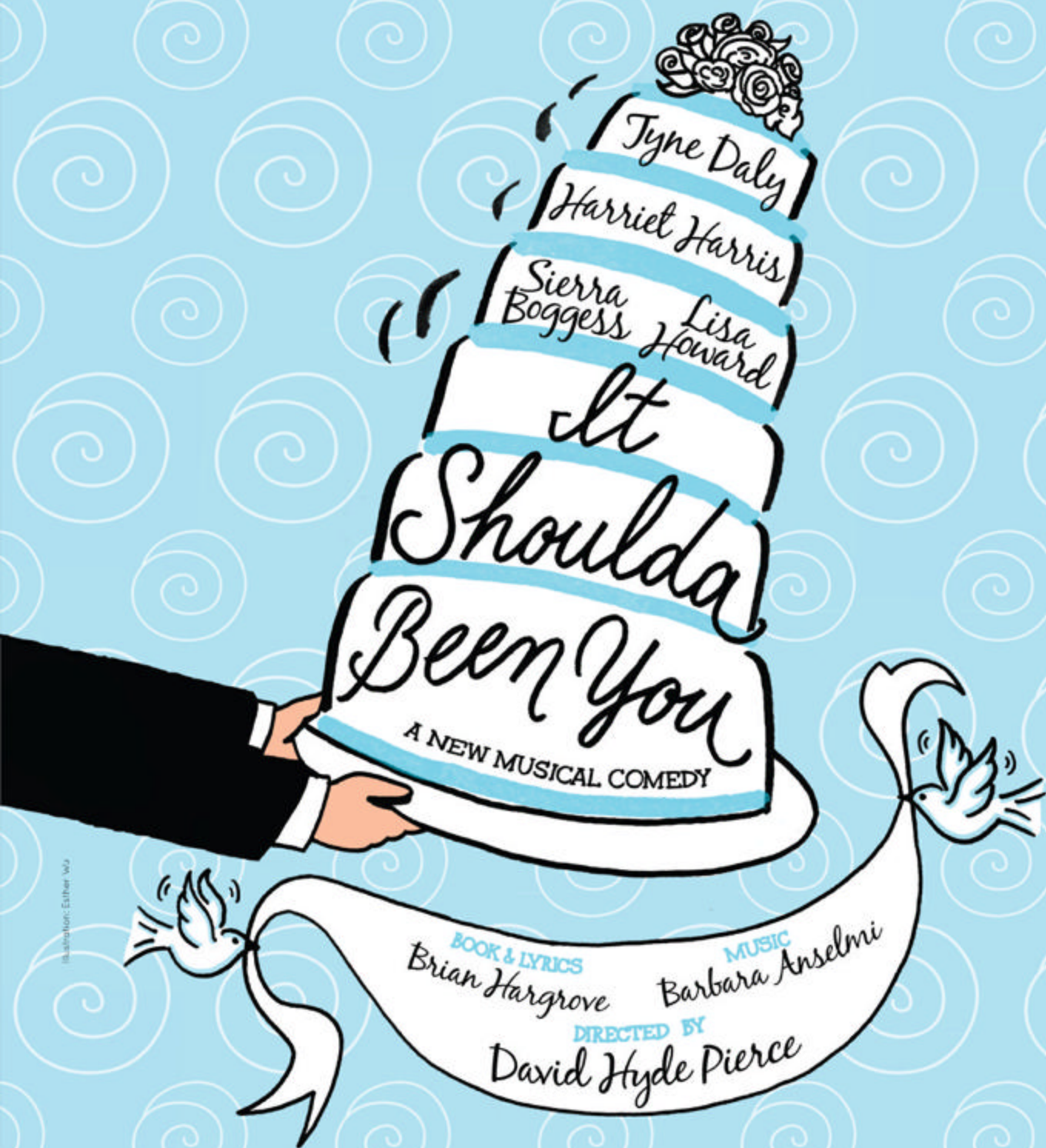


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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

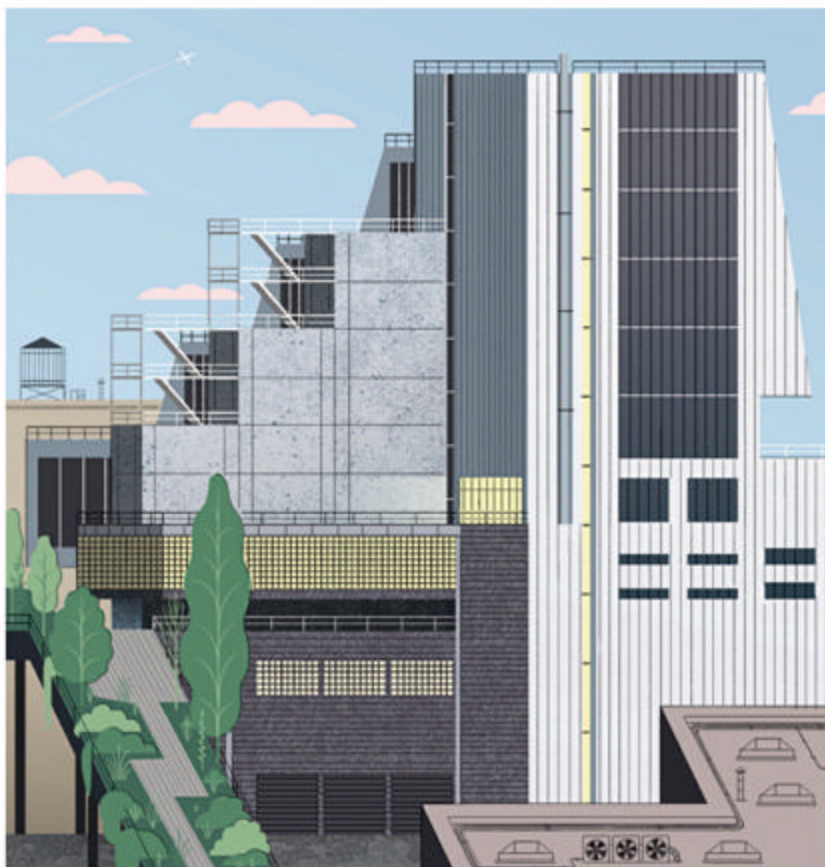
MARCH 2015    WEDNESDAY 4TH    THURSDAY 5TH    FRIDAY 6TH    SATURDAY 7TH    SUNDAY 8TH    MONDAY 9TH    TUESDAY 10TH

**BJÖRK CAN SOMETIMES** fail her songs by writing lyrics that are overlush and insistent, but she managed to untangle her words to superb effect on “Vespertine” (2001), and, now, on “Vulnicura,” her new album, she makes much of a common occurrence: the dissolution of a marriage. By working with artists such as the late John Tavener, she has learned how to use the emotional power of an aging singer’s voice (she turns fifty next year) to make music that is not pop but a kind of classical melodrama. This month, the Icelandic star performs concerts at Carnegie Hall, Kings Theatre, and City Center, and on March 8 MOMA opens a retrospective of the artist’s work that will no doubt be interesting and complicated, since museums are known to fix artists in time, while Björk insists on moving through it.

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ILLUSTRATION BY SACHIN TENG





Always downtown in spirit, the Whitney relocates from Madison Avenue to the base of the High Line.

## SPRING PREVIEW

On May 1, the **Whitney Museum** opens in its new location, on Gansevoort Street. The eight-story building, designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, has sweeping views of the Hudson River, but they won't pull focus from the inaugural show, an in-depth look at the permanent collection, which is anchored deep in the American modern and contemporary canon, from Marsden Hartley to Rachel Harrison. Titled "America Is Hard to See" (after both Robert Frost's revisionist ode to Christopher Columbus and Emile de Antonio's documentary about Eugene McCarthy's Presidential campaign), the exhibition will include plenty of crowd-pleasers—Hopper, O'Keeffe, Calder's "Circus"—but, with the Whitney's brilliant chief curator, Donna De Salvo, at the helm, expect major twists in the conventional art-historical plot. Decades before "performance" devolved into a buzzword, the Whitney was hosting radical live art of all stripes in its former Marcel Breuer-designed quarters uptown, from Ornette Coleman on saxophone to Trisha Brown scaling the walls. But the museum has never had a proper theatre until now: a hundred-and-seventy-seat space with retractable risers, so it can shift from screening room to who knows what. Even the most diehard Breuer fan would be hard pressed to find a kind word for the museum's old sculpture "garden"—an alfresco dungeon. The new Whitney boasts almost thirteen thousand square feet of outdoor space on four levels.

On May 15, Central Park welcomes "**Drifting in Daylight**," a series of projects from Creative Time, including ice cream the colors of sunset, served out of a solar-powered truck, by the feel-good Conceptualist Spencer Finch. On May 17, "**Yoko Ono: One Woman Show**," at MOMA, revisits the period between 1960 and 1971, the year Ono claims to have released flies at the museum for an unsanctioned show.

—Andrea K. Scott

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### New York Public Library

#### "Public Eye: 175 Years of Sharing Photography"

This engrossing show of more than five hundred pictures from the library's collections puts social media in historical context. To make the case that "photography has always been social," the curator Stephen C. Pinson presents pictorial evidence in books, magazines, newspapers, albums, frames, and vitrines, culminating in an interactive display, on a huge touch screen, which animates the entire length of Broadway through Instagram feeds and Google street views. The artists range from anonymous hobbyists to investigative photojournalists (Lewis Hine) to contemporary Conceptualists (Zoe Leonard). It's a rare opportunity to see the library's collection in depth, and the premise makes even vintage material feel of the moment. Through Jan. 3, 2016.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Giulio Paolini

This historically minded veteran of Arte Povera offers a portrait of the artist as equal parts Renaissance man, bricoleur, comic, and con man. In one installation, "The Author Who Thought He Existed," Paolini covers a table with scattered images: Greek statues, the planets, eyeglasses, black-and-white sketches; an overturned chair suggests its occupant's hasty departure. One-point perspective, the foundational lie of Western painting, is a fixation of Paolini's. Red diagonal lines on one wall here create a fictional vanishing point. Near it, there's a detail of a painting by Chardin: a boy blowing a soap bubble, a thing of beauty that's also on the verge of vanishing. Through March 13. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

### Ken Schles

Like Nan Goldin's "Ballad of Sexual Dependency," Schles's photography series "Invisible City," published as a book in 1988, was a pungent view of life in downtown New York. Both projects portray the East Village scene as by turns brutal and seductive, but Schles's use of grainy black-and-white film gave his images the edge in classic bohemian glamour. Pictures from "Invisible City," including that book's haunting cover image of a building ablaze in Alphabet City, are joined here by recently published photographs from the same era. Through March 14. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

### John Zurier

The American painter translates the barren splendor of Iceland into foggy gray, moss, ochre, and icy blue. Don't expect sublime landscapes; only one of these fourteen works has anything like a horizon line. In his satisfyingly scuffed abstractions—three blue stripes or an imperfectly perpendicular cross—Zurier has one eye on the view from his studio and the other trained on the private and knotty terrain of emotion. Through April 4. (Blum, 20 W. 57th St. 212-244-6055.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Ori Gersht

In a previous series, the Israeli photographer shot bullets through flower arrangements and recorded the gorgeous explosions. In his new work, silk replicas of bouquets in paintings by Jan Brueghel the Elder are seen reflected in shattered mirrors. A short video shows the mirrors collapsing in slow motion and then reassembling in a flash;





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April 2015 will mark the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln Assassination. Join us as we honor our 16th President with:

**Freedom's Song: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War | March 13-May 20, 2015**

An epic musical inspired by Lincoln's words and the people of the Civil War!

**Silent Witnesses: Artifacts of the Lincoln Assassination | March 23-May 25, 2015**

A once-in-a-lifetime exhibition!

**The Lincoln Tribute | April 14-15, 2015**

An around-the-clock event marking the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination!



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Background image © Maxwell MacKenzie. Lincoln photo courtesy of Ford's Theatre National Historic Site.



150

## UPCOMING PERFORMING ARTS:

### Iberian Suite:

Global Arts Remix  
March 3-24  
*The Kennedy Center*

This three-week festival highlights the cultures that comprise Portuguese and Spanish art, the impact they've had throughout the world, and the influences they've embraced from other cultures.

### The Originalist

March 6-April 26  
Arena Stage

Four-time Helen Hayes Award winner Edward Gero stars in this daring world premiere about one of the most incendiary cases ever in the nation's highest court.

### Man of La Mancha

March 17-April 26  
*Shakespeare Theatre*

Miguel de Cervantes' play within a play tells the tale of knight errant Don Quixote, a story of hope and "The Dare to Dream" that rises out of the gloom and despair of a prison cell.

Handl Rosenberg #3 by Elaine de Kooning, 1956; Oil on canvas; Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, courtesy Elaine de Kooning Trust



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## DC'S SPRING COLLECTION · ART EXHIBITS:

### President Lincoln is Dead: The New York Herald Reports the Assassination

Now through Jan. 10  
*The Newseum*

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination, all seven of the *New York Herald* special editions from April 15, 1865 will be displayed.

### Man Ray Human Equations

Now through May 10  
*The Phillips Collection*

Feast your eyes on surrealist artworks which illustrate the relationship between art and science at America's first museum of Modern Art.

### Watch This! Revelations in Media Art

April 24-Sept. 7  
*Smithsonian American Art Museum*

Explores key moments in history influenced by science and technology, and the relationship between technology and culture.

### Eye Pop: The Celebrity Glaze

May 22-July 10, 2016  
*National Portrait Gallery*

This exhibit explores the separate roles of subject, artist and viewer in creating the celebrity gaze, and features photos from the likes of Todd Glaser and Annie Leibovitz.

### Organic Matters Women to Watch 2015

June 5-Sept. 13  
*National Museum of Women in the Arts*

In its fourth installment, this series will feature contemporary female artists using imagery and materials taken from the natural world.



## UPCOMING CULTURAL EVENTS IN DC:

**National Cherry Blossom Festival**  
March 20-April 12  
*Citywide*

The nation's greatest springtime celebration, the festival celebrates the cherry blossom trees gifted to DC from Tokyo with more than 150 events and activities.

**Grand Reopening: The Textile Museum**  
Opening March 21

Featuring reimagined exhibitions, this weekend celebrates the reopening of the Textile Museum in its new location with art, live performances and more.

**Smithsonian @ 8 Presents: La Grande Fete**  
March 27  
*La Maison Francaise*

Held at the Embassy of France, the closing party of the Annual Francophonie Cultural Festival celebrates the music, art, film, food and customs of French-speaking regions around the world.

**The Lincoln Tribute**  
April 14-15  
*Ford's Theatre*

This multi-day event commemorates the death of President Abraham Lincoln, and allows visitors to explore the theatre, re-live the moments after he was shot and more.

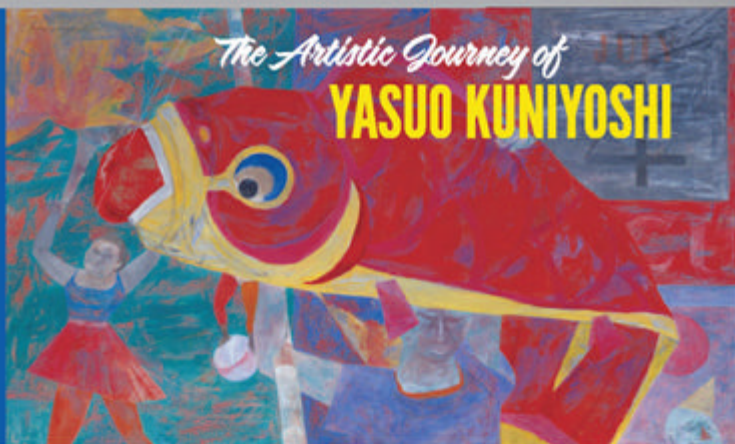
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Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Fish Kite (detail), 1950, oil on canvas, Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan. © Estate of Yasuo Kuniyoshi/Licensed by WAGA, New York, NY



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**DC Jazz Festival**  
June 10-16  
*Citywide*

Featuring more than 100 jazz performances at concert venues and clubs throughout DC, the festival presents major jazz artists from around the world and introduces emerging artists.

**AFI DOCS Film Festival**  
June 17-21  
*Citywide*

The American Film Institute's 5-day international festival presents diverse documentaries ranging in topics from national politics, education and health to music, sports and culture.





big color photographs freeze the moments of dazzling disintegration. Each bright abstraction is as faceted as a gem and as menacing as a bomb on the brink of detonation. Through March 14. (CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766.)

#### Alfredo Jaar

The political Chilean artist is obsessed with the violence of recent Latin-American history and with art's ability (or failure) to act as a witness. Here, in a dark sequence of corridors, he displays little-known images from 1978 by a Dutch photojournalist, documenting the last days of Nicaragua's dictatorship—a man lying dead by the roadside, a dozen men rounded up by police. A projected image shows two daughters grieving for their dead father, then fades the background to black and flares the women to such blazing white that their impressions remain on your retina for seconds afterward. War photography, Jaar understands, can never convey more than a trace of the collective anguish. Through March 28. (Galerie Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)

#### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

##### Jon Kessler

The New York sculptor is best known for his paranoiac, immersive, televisual installations, but since 1994 he has also been making much smaller works given as gifts. Most have kinetic elements, and look like things that Mark di Suvero might make if he drank ayahuasca: a seesaw that counterposes stones and a bird skeleton, a pendulum whose base is a Chinatown-sourced horse figurine, chains providing ballast for water glasses with flowers. Each one expresses Kessler's love, wit, and generosity. Through March 28. (Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400.)

##### Danny McDonald

Male action figures—Uncle Sam, Yoda, Robocop, Twinkie the Kid—are combined in unsettling, sometimes narrative combinations, which the New York artist displays here like relics. At times, an unobvious homoeroticism lands with a thud: G.I. Joe, machine gun strapped to his back, quenches his thirst with a phallic bottle. But if McDonald's concatenations can feel glib—note the nod to Jeff Koons in four Incredible Hulks stacked like totem-pole figures—the show's over-all tone is gratifyingly acid. Through March 14. (Maccarone, 98 Morton St. 212-431-4977.)



Ed Koren's new show, "Wet Ink," includes the above lithograph and others from his "Bikes and Beasts" series, as well as drawings published in this magazine. It opens on March 5 at the Luise Ross gallery.

## ABOVE & BEYOND

#### "The Lives of Hamilton Fish"

Art in General, a nonprofit art space, presents a multimedia storytelling event about people who lived in New York State during the Great Depression. The piece chronicles the deaths, one day apart in 1936, of two different men named Hamilton Fish, one a statesman and one a serial killer. The interdisciplinary exploration is the brainchild of the sculptor, songwriter, and performer Rachel Mason, and it takes the form of a "cinematic rock opera performance." In other words, a film is projected,

and the vocal parts are performed live by actors, who also act out what happens on-screen; live musicians play along to the film's score. (Root Studios, 443 W. 18th St. [artingeneral.org](http://artingeneral.org). March 6-7.)

#### AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The contemporary-art specialist Phillips holds its first two sales of the year on March 3-4. The evening sale contains pricier contemporary lots, including one of Richard Prince's manly cowboy images, from 1986. "Under the Influence," the next day, is a compendium

of works by younger figures, including the Russian-born artist Kon Trubkovich, whose "Untitled" may remind

you—not unintentionally—of a scratchy image on a Soviet-era television screen. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

#### READINGS AND TALKS

##### Doctor Dread

The reggae producer Gary Himelfarb discusses his new memoir, "The Half That's Never Been Told," joined by David Hinds, of Steel Pulse. (Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza. 718-230-2100. March 4 at 7.)

##### Franklin Park Reading Series

Lev Grossman, James Hannaham, Sarah Gerard, and other writers celebrate the sixth anniversary of this monthly event. (Franklin Park Bar and Beer Garden, 618 St. Johns Pl., between Franklin and Classon Aves., Brooklyn. [franklinparkbrooklyn.com](http://franklinparkbrooklyn.com). March 9 at 8.)





Molly Rankin brings the toe-tapping, yearning songs of Alvays to town for a pair of shows.

## SPRING PREVIEW

It's not just hope that springs eternal—it's youth itself. On March 26, the twenty-nine-year-old piano-playing crooner **Tobias Jesso, Jr.**, makes his local debut, with a show at the Mercury Lounge (followed the next night by an appearance at Baby's All Right, in Brooklyn), performing the attenuated and piercingly sad ballads on his first album, "Goon," which comes out on March 17. Molly Rankin is a twenty-seven-year-old singer with a beguiling, windswept voice (she was born into the Rankin family, a legendary folk group from Nova Scotia). She fronts the band **Alvays** (pronounced "always"), which released a self-titled first album of fuzzy, upbeat, and romantic pop last year and is now looking forward to two of its biggest shows yet in New York: a headlining gig at the Bowery Ballroom, on April 2, and an appearance as the opening act for the Decemberists, at the Beacon Theatre, on April 6. **Natalie Prass**, a twenty-eight-year-old singer-songwriter and Nashville refugee (she recently moved to Richmond, Virginia), released her debut album in January. The self-titled collection of heartbreak songs, which took years to finish, is abundant with orchestral horn and string parts, but at the Bowery Ballroom, on May 4, she'll be backed by a spare three-piece band, which puts the anguish of her voice at the forefront.

Youth will always have its place in the music business, but some things are timeless. The Village Vanguard celebrates its eightieth anniversary, starting March 10. The pianist **Jason Moran** will be there through March 15, along with jazz greats, poets, and comedians. Touring together for the first time since 1978, **Chick Corea** and **Herbie Hancock** visit Carnegie Hall on April 9. Billie Holiday, who got her start in Harlem as a teen-ager, would have been a hundred this year. On April 10, three days after Holiday's birthday, **Cassandra Wilson**, whose new record, "Coming Forth by Day," is a celebration of the singer, takes the party to the Apollo Theatre.

—John Donohue

## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### Kristin Andreassen

This inventive local singer-songwriter, who has played with Uncle Earl and Sometimes Why, has done just fine on her own. "Crayola Doesn't Make a Color for Your Eyes," a song on her first solo record, "Kiss Me Hello," won the Children's Category in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest in 2007. At Joe's Pub on March 10, she celebrates the release of her second solo album, "Gondolier," in the company of a full band, special guests, and shadow puppets. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

### Will Butler

The singer, composer, and multi-instrumentalist is a core member of Arcade Fire (his brother is its front man) who earned an Oscar nomination along with Owen Pallett for their score to Spike Jonze's film "Her." But his most riveting work may be on the horizon, and his solo debut, "Policy," comes out on Tuesday. The lead single off the album, "Take My Side," is a raw, rollicking rock song that contains blissful pop moments and brilliantly bratty lyrics. The rest of the album incorporates New Wave elements, ballads, and rockabilly, suggesting that Butler is a free spirit on the loose. (March 5: Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. March 7: Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800.)

### Tony Conrad

The experimental musician, filmmaker, visual artist, and educator has been an influence on contemporary music since 1963, when he joined La Monte Young in the Theatre of Eternal Music (also known as the Dream Syndicate), an ensemble that later included the Welsh violinist John Cale. The group, which helped invent minimalism, played ecstatic, transfixing drone-based music, and Cale took some of the group's sonic insights with him when he joined the Velvet Underground, where they made a permanent impression on rock. In 1973, Conrad made his own contribution to rock aesthetics when he collaborated with the German group Faust on a beautiful, austere record called "Outside the Dream Syndicate." To celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday, Issue Project Room is presenting Conrad in two concerts. On March 5, at the First Unitarian Congregational Society (116 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn), he will be mostly on violin, accompanied by the ritualistic composer **Charlemagne Palestine** on organ. On March 7, he is performing a benefit for the organizers. (issueprojectroom.org.)

### Punch Brothers

"Virtuosity loves company" might be the motto of this act—the mandolinist and lead singer Chris Thile (also of Nickel Creek), the banjoist Noam Pikelny, the bassist Paul Kowert, the guitarist Chris Eldridge, and the fiddle player Gabe Witcher are all brilliant musicians. The quintet bends the boundaries of bluegrass, tying in elements of jazz, pop, rock, country, and classical music. Their newly released fourth album, "The Phosphorescent Blues," is their most richly complex work to date, starting with a ten-minute track, "Familiarity," full of lightning-quick finger-plucking, moving melodies, and honeyed harmonies. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500. March 5.)

### Suicide

The singer and visual artist Alan Vega and the keyboardist Martin Rev formed this duo here



in 1970, and were later part of the first wave of CBGB punk. Their spare, guitarless lineup and performance-art overtones set them apart, while their eerie sound, created by Rev's synthesizers and Vega's half-spoken, blues-tinged vocals, greatly influenced industrial and techno music. Both Vega and Rev came from working-class neighborhoods in the outer boroughs, and some of their best songs—such as “Frankie Teardrop,” a gripping narrative off their self-titled 1977 debut album, about a Vietnam veteran committing suicide—exhibit a gritty realism rarely matched in underground music. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 7.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Anat Cohen

The clarinet may never reassume its place in the forefront of jazz, but it won't be for any lack of trying on Cohen's part. This Israeli-born stylist is also a fine saxophonist, but her skillful clarinet excursions run through a wide variety of styles, including post-bop, New Orleans jazz, Brazilian music, klezmer, and Middle Eastern idioms. She first surfaced on the New York scene nearly two decades ago, and this engagement, in celebration of her new album, “Luminosa,” finds her fleshing out her quartet with special guests during part of the run. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. March 4-8.)

### Albert (Tootie) Heath

The seventy-nine-year-old drummer has developed a terrific, knockabout familiarity with the pianist **Ethan Iverson** (of the Bad Plus) and the bassist **Ben Street**, two musicians nearly half his age. The trio's winning effect is apparent on their new album, “Philadelphia Beat.” Its mix of bebop classics and more far-reaching choices, including the disco hit “I Will Survive” and an adaptation of a Bach chorale prelude, points to the delightfully off-kilter sensibility that unites them. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. March 3-8.)

### Vijay Iyer

Set next to his more dauntingly ambitious projects, the trio albums of the relentlessly inventive pianist are among his most inviting recordings. His new release, “Break Stuff,” blends rhythmically alert original work with reinterpretations of classics by John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, and Billy Strayhorn (including a gorgeous solo rendition of “Blood Count”). The material highlights the now symbiotic connection Iyer has developed with the bassist **Stephan Crump** and the drummer **Marcus Gilmore**. Iyer brings his trio to the Metropolitan Museum's Temple of Dendur on March 7. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. metmuseum.org.)

### Phillip Johnston

One of the few major players to concentrate solely on the soprano sax, Johnston is best known as a mainstay of the **Microscopic Septet**, the enduring and unclassifiable ensemble he co-founded with the pianist Joel Forrester three decades ago. During a weeklong residency at the Stone, Johnston, who now lives in Australia, is displaying the broad range of his musical interests. He will be performing solo (with prerecorded audio), in duos (with the accordionist **Guy Klucsevsek** and the saxophonist **Ned Rothenberg**), and with the Micros, who will be making a pair of shape-shifting appearances, one with a set of entirely free improvisations and another without their rhythm section. (Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. March 3-8.)

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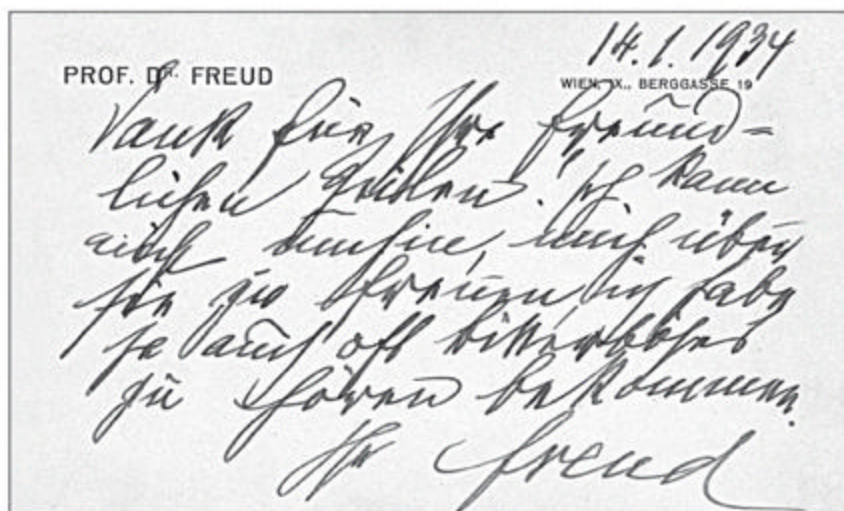
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In "She's Funny That Way," Owen Wilson directs, Imogen Poots acts, and Jennifer Aniston listens.

## SPRING PREVIEW

Peter Bogdanovich, a master of screwball comedy and a connoisseur of classic movies, fuses these talents in **"She's Funny That Way"** (May 1), a New York-centric satire, starring Imogen Poots as a former prostitute, now an actress, who auditions for a play directed by a former client (Owen Wilson). The film's original title, "Squirrels to the Nuts," is a line from Ernst Lubitsch's 1946 comedy, "Cluny Brown," and Bogdanovich puts it at the center of the action. Will Forte co-stars as the playwright, who falls for the actress; Jennifer Aniston plays a therapist with an attitude.

A Danish-Argentine Western is an unlikely but effective formula in **"Jauja"** (March 20). It stars Viggo Mortensen as an army engineer in nineteenth-century Patagonia, who pursues his teen-age daughter (Viilbjørk Agger Malling) after she has run off with a young officer. The director, Lisandro Alonso, sets the violent, hallucinatory story in a forbidding landscape and films it with a square, vignettied frame that gives it the dreamlike feeling of archival photography.

The writer and director Noah Baumbach's collaboration with Ben Stiller, which started with "Greenberg," continues with **"While We're Young"** (March 27). Stiller and Naomi Watts play documentary filmmakers whose marriage is shaken by a new friendship with a young couple (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried). Baumbach, long fascinated by the breached boundaries of art and life, reworks the theme in the drama of the couples' calamitous joint artistic venture.

Performance and reality also clash in Olivier Assayas's **"Clouds of Sils Maria"** (April 10). Juliette Binoche plays an actress preparing for a role as an older woman in a conflict-riddled relationship with a younger one. Kristen Stewart plays the actress's assistant, who becomes both an artistic collaborator and an uneasy intimate.

—Richard Brody

## NOW PLAYING

### Approaching the Elephant

Amanda Rose Wilder's nuanced and passionate documentary, about the first year of a "free" elementary school in New Jersey, reveals the glories and the limitations of unstructured classrooms and observational filmmaking alike. The school relies on self-regulation. There are no required classes, and all rules are decided democratically by the students (of whom there are about a dozen, all seemingly between six and ten years old); the teachers function mainly as safety officers, consultants, and parliamentarians. Wilder centers the drama on Jio, a tall, spirited boy who overflows with both creative and destructive energy. When he is ultimately voted out of the school, the class philosopher, Lucy, whom he had bullied, says, "I don't like the things he does, but it's boring when he's not here." Wilder's black-and-white cinematography focusses on the children's inspiring dialectics and painful conflicts, but she omits her relationships with students, teachers, and parents; the resulting impersonal stance seems like a needless contrivance.—Richard Brody (In limited release.)

### Buzzard

The second shot of Joel Potrykus's second feature offers a cinematic high: a five-minute-plus closeup of a pale, scruffy, moon-eyed, blandly insolent young man pulling a fast one. Marty Jackitansky (Joshua Burge) tells a bank officer to close his account and then reopens it immediately for a fifty-dollar new-account bonus. A temp at the same bank, Marty is a brazen master of gaming the system; he returns the bank's office supplies to a store for cash and calls consumer hot lines to demand refunds—but when he steals small refund checks meant for the bank's customers, it's a scam too far. Fearing arrest, Marty goes on the run. Potrykus constructs the character of Marty as an Emma Bovary who's in thrall to horror movies and headbanger rock, a raging king of anomie and attitude in a suburban wasteland of no future. (The director co-stars as Marty's only friend, Derek, a super-nerdy colleague). Marty remains a blank even as his violent fantasies break through to reality, but his tenuous connections to his family and the countdown of his scant funds sketch a chilling story. Potrykus's puckishly outrageous visions are short on insight, but they pack an enduring hallucinatory power.—R.B. (In limited release.)

### Fifty Shades of Grey

The setting is Washington State, the place where love gets weird. Could there be something in the rain? Boy meets girl, but there's always a hitch; in "Twilight," the boy was a vampire, and now, in Sam Taylor-Johnson's gloomy new film, the girl is swept off her feet, only to discover that the boy wants to tie her up by the wrists. It's like an R-rated game of Twister. The script was adapted by Kelly Marcel from the golden-tongued best-seller by E. L. James, but not quite adapted enough. Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) remains as dreary as ever, despite the snugness of his torture room and his peculiar habit of sitting down to play Chopin, molto adagio, at the drop of a riding crop. As Anastasia Steele, the bashful student who yearns for him, Dakota Johnson strives courageously, and even finds traces of wit in the role, but she still bumps into the old, disheartening question: would the girl adore the boy if it weren't for his billions, his blinding white shirts, and the ride she gets on his chopper? Warning: the film contains whipping scenes, which some pastry chefs may find distressing.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 2/23 & 3/2/15.) (In wide release.)



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## OPENING BUZZARD

Reviewed in Now Playing.  
Opening March 6.  
(In limited release.)

## CHAPPIE

In this science-fiction drama, directed by Neill Blomkamp, a police robot is reprogrammed to act like a civilian. Starring Hugh Jackman and Sigourney Weaver. Opening March 6. (In wide release.)

## REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

*Titles in bold are reviewed.*

### ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"Screenwriters and the Blacklist." March 6 at 9:15 and March 10 at 7: "Cry of Battle" (1963, Irving Lerner).

### BAM CINÉMA TEK

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 8 at 6: "May Allah Bless France!" (2014, Abd Al Malik).

### FILM FORUM

In revival. March 6-12 (call for showtimes): "**Grey Gardens**."

### FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 9 at 6:45: "Eat Your Bones" (2014, Jean-Charles Hue). • March 8 at 2: "My Friend Victoria" (2014, Jean-Paul Civeyrac).

### FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

The films of Benoît Jacquot. March 10 at 4 and 7:30: "A Single Girl" (1995).

### IFC CENTER

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 8 at 9: "Eat Your Bones" (2014, Jean-Charles Hue). • March 9 at 9: "Gaby Baby Doll."

### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The films of Wim Wenders. March 4 at 4 and March 8 at 1:30: "**The Left-Handed Woman**." • March 4 at 7: "The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick" (1971). • March 6 at 7 and March 9 at 6: "**Kings of the Road**." • March 7 at 1:30: "Until the End of the World," the director's cut (1991/94).

### MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"See It Big!" March 6 at 7: "Playtime" (1967, Jacques Tati). • March 7 at 7:30: "Nothing But a Man" (1964, Michael Roemer).



### MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Allan Dwan's "Silver Lode," from 1954, in our digital edition and online.

## Focus

This comic thriller begins as a twist on the classic crime romance "Trouble in Paradise": two smooth grifters, the veteran Nicky (Will Smith) and the novice Jess (Margot Robbie), pick each other's pockets and thus seal a partnership made in heaven. Nicky teaches Jess some secrets and recruits her for his high-class, quasi-corporate criminal team, which moves into New Orleans to fleece the yokels on hand for a Super Bowl-like event. A compulsive gambler who risks the team's bankroll, Nicky is also a consummate professional who's unwilling to take a chance on love. But he and Jess meet again later in Buenos Aires, when they're working opposite sides of a Formula One race. Smith is breezy, canny, understated, and Robbie hides scalpel-sharp wiles behind a poker face, but the writers and directors, Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, submerge the stars' easy chemistry in a murky stew of clever yet absurd plot twists of a nearly superheroic hyperbole. That sound you hear is the high-fives in the writers' room, and that, unfortunately, is where the filmmakers' focus remains. With Adrian Martinez, as an able accomplice with no verbal filter, and Gerald McRaney, as a crusty arm-twister with pride in his craft.—R.B. (In wide release.)

## Gaby Baby Doll

This subtly frantic romantic comedy by Sophie Letourneur is both a sentimental delight and a cinematic equation: add a budget, a script, and stars to a director of homemade, improvised, personal movies. Letourneur's solution is to seek the exquisite. Lolita Chammah, performing like a French Greta Gerwig, plays Gaby, a young woman whose psychiatrist lends her his country house to recover from a nervous breakdown. Left there by her friends, unable to stay alone, Gaby recruits men from the local café to sleep chastely with her until, running out of candidates, she crashes with Nicolas (played by the pop singer Benjamin Biolay), the caretaker of a nearby abandoned château, who lives in a tiny tin-roofed shack. Letourneur unfolds Gaby's neurotic pathos in puckish yet painterly images of the rustic landscape. When night falls and Gaby's terrors deepen, the movie's eerie darkness is punctured only by the delicate dance of flashlights. Nicolas, a hirsute hermit, is as unfit for company as Gaby is for solitude; Letourneur pulls off the predestined magic with a light and giddy touch. In French.—R.B. (IFC Center; March 9.)

## Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem

Ronit Elkabetz's blend of intensity and containment brings to mind the prime of Meryl Streep. Here, she plays Viviane, who is seeking a divorce from Elisha (Simon Abkarian) after thirty years of marriage, not because

of adultery or abuse but simply for lack of love. In her path stands rabbinical law, which demands the husband's consent—something that the saturnine Simon will not give. The movie is written and directed by Elkabetz herself, together with her brother Shlomi. Almost all of the film takes place inside a courtroom, at irregular intervals over five years, but there is no sense of drag or slump; on the contrary, the action quivers with tension, impatience, comic heat, and, beneath it all, an irrepressible rage. In Hebrew.—A.L. (In limited release.)

## Grey Gardens

The wreckage left by Gatsbyesque frivolity is plumbed to desperate depths in Albert and David Maysles's 1975 documentary, about a formerly wealthy mother and daughter, erstwhile luminaries of the society pages, living in squalid chaos in their once glorious East Hampton estate. Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale (born in 1895), called Big Edie, was Jackie Onassis's aunt; her daughter, Edith Bouvier Beale, Little Edie (born in 1917), was Onassis's cousin. Before the filming started, Onassis came to their rescue, getting their pest-infested, garbage-filled home cleaned up to save it from condemnation by the health authorities, but the Maysles catch the Beales on the downturn again. Performing flamboyantly for the filmmakers and hungrily seeking their approval, mother and daughter spill their lifelong recriminations over circumstances that led to their isolation, poverty, and folie à deux. The pathos is heightened by Big Edie's bedridden singing of classic show tunes: she's a graceful master of timing and tone, a nearly great artist who squandered her chances and her life. Little Edie, still clinging to vestiges of youth and inflamed with desire, nearly raves for David Maysles as she performs majorette routines from her junior-college days. Rarely have high spirits and theatrical energy seemed like such a tragic waste; an era and its myths seem to be dying on-screen in real time. Directed by the Maysles brothers, Ellen Hovde, and Muffie Meyer.—R.B. (Film Forum; March 6-12.)

## Kings of the Road

In 1975, Wim Wenders headed to West Germany's Wild East, along the border of the Iron Curtain, to film an American-style road movie about Bruno (Rüdiger Vogler), a shaggy film-projector repairman who lives in his truck, and Robert (Hanns Zischler), a despairing intellectual whom he picks up along his route. The desolate region is haunted by the past (the movie opens with the confessions of an ex-Nazi theatre owner) and bears the scars of war, yet Wenders coolly captures the American invasion of Bruno's life off the grid. Rock music and Hollywood movies fill Bruno's days and nights, and

Wenders fills the movie with cinephilic quotations and references. Robert, a literary man, arrives like a character from "Pierrot le Fou" and acts like a character from "L'Avventura," but he forms a duo with the easy-riding Bruno that seems closer to Laurel and Hardy. Bewildering in a wasteland has rarely been filmed with such tender irony and sentimental optimism. In German.—R.B. (MOMA; March 6 and March 9.)

## Kingsman: The Secret Service

The new film from Matthew Vaughn is about a British organization, dedicated to the common good, that lurks behind a tailoring establishment in London's Savile Row. It comprises a Camelot of knightly spies, each with an appropriate alias. Galahad (Colin Firth), for instance, answers to Arthur (Michael Caine), and relies on the technical wizardry of Merlin (Mark Strong). Their current task is to trounce the nefarious Valentine (Samuel L. Jackson), who plans to brainwash the cell-phone users of the world. (Whether this really needs doing, the film never dares to ask.) In the process, Galahad must call on the streetwise skills of Eggsy (Taron Egerton), who is gradually groomed for a world of bespoke gadgets and flattering suits. The movie whips along, snatching laughs where it can, desperately aping the early style of 007, but it's also content to uphold social distinctions that would have looked creaky half a century ago, and not everyone will savor the mismatch between the discreet manners of the agents and the unhinged restlessness of the director's approach. If you don't fancy watching Firth commit bone-crushing mayhem, look away.—A.L. (2/16/15) (In wide release.)

## The Left-Handed Woman

A hidden masterpiece. Peter Handke's first feature film, from 1978, adapted from his own novella, tells a feminist story with a keen-eyed empathy untainted by doctrine. A bourgeois German family living in stifling comfort in the suburbs of Paris is torn apart when Marianne (Edith Clever) suddenly decides she wants to be rid of her energetic, adoring husband (Bruno Ganz) and make a literary life of her own. Handke's keen dramatic sense guides the action from outer to inner truths: Marianne's voice isn't heard for the first ten minutes, and then it erupts with sharply reasoned fury. He frames the closely observed action with tactile immediacy: the suburban landscape vibrates with the gusty rush of trains, a fireplace gives off palpable heat, and the springtime light seems painted on the screen by an artist's hand. Handke balances deep moods with vivid side business, including whimsical games and painful provocations by Marianne's young son (Markus Mühleisen). Brilliant turns by Rüdiger Vogler (playing himself)



and Bernhard Minetti, as Marianne's father—a writer who delivers tough advice—round out the bracing, poetic blend of experience and imagination. In German and French.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 4 and March 8.)

### What We Do in the Shadows

A mock documentary from New Zealand, written and directed by Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi. They also star, as two of the four vampires who share a house in Wellington, doing their best to blend in with—and occasionally feast upon—the local community. The basic conceit sounds wearisome; if Mel Brooks and Leslie Nielsen couldn't make bloodsucking funny in "Dead and Loving It," what hope is there for anyone else? From this unpromising material, however, Clement and Waititi have fashioned something sprightly and smart, stuffed with gags from the start and trimmed with an unexpected charm. Time and again, the exotic (or simply messy) needs of the heroes are set off against the blandness of their environs—and, most notably, of their unbitten pals, such as Stu (Stuart Rutherford) and Jackie (Jackie van Beek), who refuse to be awed by the presence of the undead. Like all effective spoofs, the movie sinks its teeth so deeply into its chosen genre that the impression may turn out to be permanent; from now on, trying to watch the "Twilight" films with a straight face will feel harder than ever before.—*A.L.* (2/16/15) (In limited release.)

### Wild Canaries

Turning the daily life of a not quite bourgeois and not quite bohemian couple into a screwball caper, the writer and director Lawrence Michael Levine delivers a fast, loose-limbed, incisively inventive twist on a Brooklyn murder mystery. He and his real-life wife, Sophia Takal, star, as Noah, a partner in a struggling film business, and Barri, who's seeking to renovate a resort. When their elderly neighbor Sylvia dies, suspicion falls upon her furtive son, Anthony (Kevin Corrigan), and Barri decides to spy on him. The couple's strains come to the fore as Barri's daring pranks rope Noah into danger. Romantic subplots involving their roommate, Jean (Alia Shawkat), and Noah's business partner, Eleanor (Annie Parisse), give an added edge to the couple's latent discontents and screaming fights. As performers, Levine and Takal are both practiced and casual; as a director, Levine displays a sharp comedic touch; the result is self-deprecating and self-revealing. As in classics of the genre, the couple's quiet actions, rich in symbolic revelations of unspoken desires, speak even louder than their loudly delivered words.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### Wild Tales

The Argentinean writer-director Damián Szifron's dark comedy is composed of six sketches about anger and revenge. All of them feature mildly clever twists that are themselves the point, making any description a spoiler. The premises involve a peculiar airplane voyage, a restaurant where a waitress serves a lifelong enemy, a case of road rage on a desolate highway, a demolition engineer with a grudge against the motor-vehicles bureau, a hit-and-run accident caused by a wealthy man's son, and a Jewish wedding where the bride's suspicions lead to mayhem. Each sketch depicts violence and illustrates the arrogance of the rich and powerful, but the moralizing is as facile as the plotting is mechanical. The deliberate pacing is calculated to underline the swerves in the script, which offers little context or characterization. Szifron's brightly lit theatrics and simplistic attitudes seem borrowed from television commercials. In Spanish.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

# THE THEATRE



Kelli O'Hara and Ken Watanabe star in the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic "The King and I."

## SPRING PREVIEW

Broadway is an old dog, slow to learn new tricks. But every now and then it aces one of its old tricks. The audiences who flocked to Lincoln Center's 2008 revival of "South Pacific" won't soon forget its thrilling first moments: the lights dimmed, the opening strains of "Bali Ha'i" filled the Vivian Beaumont, and a moving platform revealed a sumptuous thirty-piece orchestra. For theatregoers accustomed to dinky offstage bands, it was an anachronistic marvel, instantly evoking Broadway's golden age. Lincoln Center Theatre is clearly trying to re-create the magic with "**The King and I**," beginning previews March 12. Not only is it another Rodgers and Hammerstein classic (with some dated attempts at multiculturalism), the revival shares with "South Pacific" a director, Bartlett Sher, and a winsome leading lady, Kelli O'Hara, who stars as Anna, opposite Ken Watanabe's King of Siam.

Spring is Broadway's busiest time, but two upcoming shows have devoured much of the hype. The Royal Shakespeare Company's "**Wolf Hall: Parts One & Two**," based on Hilary Mantel's prize-winning historical novels, arrives at the Winter Garden starting March 20. The two installments can be seen separately or, if your appetite is Henry VIII-size, in one big feast. Harvey Weinstein makes his first outing as a lead Broadway producer with "**Finding Neverland**" (March 15, at the Lunt-Fontanne), a musical adaptation of the 2004 film. Matthew Morrison plays J. M. Barrie, the childlike author of "Peter Pan"; the resourceful Diane Paulus directs.

Off Broadway is just as busy, and, in some cases, just as starry. At Classic Stage Company, **Peter Sarsgaard** plays Hamlet, directed by Austin Pendleton. (Previews begin March 27.) At the Public, Julie Taymor directs "Grounded" (April 7), George Brant's drama about a fighter pilot reassigned to drone warfare. The Hollywood heavy playing this warmonger? You guessed it: **Anne Hathaway**.

—*Michael Schulman*



**ALSO NOTABLE**  
**BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AND CRAZY**

Second Stage

**BROOKLYNITE**

Vineyard

**CABARET**

Studio 54

**CHURCHILL**

New World Stages

**FASHIONS FOR MEN**

Mint

**FISH IN THE DARK**

Cort

**HAMILTON**

Public. (Reviewed in this issue.)

**HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH**

Belasco

**THE HEIDI CHRONICLES**

Music Box

**HONEYMOON IN VEGAS**

Nederlander

**IF/THEN**

Richard Rodgers

**THE INSURGENTS**

Bank Street Theatre

**INTO THE WOODS**

Laura Pels

**IT'S ONLY A PLAY**

Jacobs

**JOSEPHINE AND I**

Public

**KINKY BOOTS**

Hirschfeld

**LET THE RIGHT ONE IN**

St. Ann's Warehouse.  
Through March 8.

**THE LION**

Lynn Redgrave Theatre

**LITTLE CHILDREN DREAM OF GOD**

Roundabout Underground

**LIVES OF THE SAINTS**

The Duke on 42nd Street

**MATILDA THE MUSICAL**

Shubert

**THE MYSTERY OF LOVE & SEX**

Mitzi E. Newhouse

**AN OCTOORON**

Polonsky Shakespeare Center

**ON THE TOWN**

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**ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

American Airlines Theatre

**PLACEBO**

Playwrights Horizons

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Atlantic Theatre Company

**RASHEEDA SPEAKING**

Pershing Square Signature Center

**THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS**

City Center Stage I

**WICKED**

Gershwin

**OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS**

**The Audience**

Helen Mirren stars in a play by Peter Morgan, about Queen Elizabeth II and her private meetings with twelve Prime Ministers in the course of sixty years. Stephen Daldry directs. Also starring Dylan Baker and Judith Ivey. In previews. Opens March 8. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**Ghosts After Ibsen**

Austin Pendleton directs a play by Thomas Kilroy, loosely adapted from Ibsen's "Ghosts," in which a dead father's sins come back to haunt his children. In previews. Opens March 6. (The Cell, 338 W. 23rd St. 800-838-3006.)

**A Happy End**

At the Abingdon, Alex Dmitriev directs a play by the Israeli writer Iddo Netanyahu, in which a Jewish family living in Berlin must decide whether to leave Germany as Hitler comes to power. In previews. Opens March 10. (312 W. 36th St. 866-811-4111.)

**The Liquid Plain**

Signature Theatre Company presents the New York premiere of a play by Naomi Wallace, set in the late eighteenth century in Rhode Island, about two runaway slaves who seek freedom. Directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah. In previews. Opens March 8. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

**Lonesome Traveler**

James O'Neil's play, part of the 5A season, incorporates classic folk songs in this consideration of the genre's legacy. Previews begin March 7. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

**Made in China**

The Irish comedian Des Bishop recounts his experience doing standup in Mandarin for a Chinese audience, in this one-man show. Previews begin March 9. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

**Small Mouth Sounds**

Bess Wohl wrote this play, premiering at Ars Nova, about a group of strangers on a silent retreat. Rachel Chavkin directs. Previews begin March 10. (511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)

**NOW PLAYING**

**Big Love**

In Charles Mee's wild adaptation of Aeschylus' "The Danaids," three strong women in filthy wedding dresses break into the villa of a wealthy bachelor in Italy, seeking refuge from their home in Greece, where they and their forty-seven sisters were about to be forcibly married to their cousins. When

three of the fiancés arrive at the villa, bedlam ensues: among other fun moments, a woman is repeatedly thrown against the wall, at which point projections of photographs of broken glass fly out behind her; a man is castrated and his penis is hacked up in a blender; a tenor sings a gorgeous version of Jason Mraz's song "I Won't Give Up"; and characters, frustrated, repeatedly jump up in the air and crash hard on the floor. Under the direction of Mee's longtime collaborator, Tina Landau, all eleven fine actors communicate vividly, through speech, song, dance, and a lot of physical humor, the difficulties of being women and men. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

**Bright Half Life**

In Tanya Barfield's engaging new play, presented by Women's Project, two attractive and articulate women (Rachael Holmes and Rebecca Henderson) meet at work in their twenties, date secretly, fall in love, have children, get married (when it becomes legal), fight a lot, split, and, separately, watch their kids grow up. This well-written portrayal of smart women finding, losing, and finding themselves and each other again, is profound, and it's made more so by the fact that Barfield, rather than telling the story linearly, mixes up the chronology like someone shaking up the pieces of a puzzle and throwing them on a table: one moment the women are breaking up in middle age, the next, one is telling the other for the first time how beautiful she is. As a result, past, present, and future are contained in each moment, and every one of them feels full. Under the direction of Leigh Silverman, Holmes and Henderson are wonderful. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**The Events**

In 2011, the playwright David Greig and the director Ramin Gray, of the Actors Touring Company, visited Norway in the wake of Anders Breivik's shocking mass killing. A female vicar they met inspired the main character of this doleful theatre piece, which features a different choir every night. Neve McIntosh and Clifford Samuel play, respectively, a lesbian priest whose singers have been massacred and the various people she encounters on her quest for meaning. Their interplay comes off as a bit generic—we've seen this story over and over in the news, always with jarring particulars—but it's the purposely under-rehearsed choir members, acting as a Greek chorus of bystanders, who lend the piece its poignant atmosphere of community ritual. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200.)

**The Iceman Cometh**

Nathan Lane brings his often touching sad-sack clown act to the leading role in this Goodman Theatre production of Eugene O'Neill's disturbing drama. Lane plays a periodic drunk who comes to Harry Hope's saloon to liberate the denizens there by destroying their dreams, and the performance, though lacking in nuance, mostly works. But the real standout here is Brian Dennehy, who plays Larry, an old alcoholic looking forward to death. Under the direction of Robert Falls, Dennehy's gorgeous performance is characterized by simplicity and stillness, the mark of a mature artist with nothing to prove. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

**The Nether**

Jennifer Haley's intriguing play, for MCC, probes the blurry border between what we do online and what we do off it. In the not so distant future—a time in which trees, wine, and IRL interfaces have become rarities—a no-nonsense detective (Merritt Wever, of "Nurse Jackie") determines to shut down a virtual realm called the Hideaway. A quaint Victorian retreat, the Hideaway caters to clients with a taste for child pornography. Child murder, too, with strangely willing victims. "Perhaps you'd like to start with the axe," suggests nine-year-old Iris politely. Both incisive and naïve, Haley's script argues that "just because it's virtual doesn't mean it isn't real." Anne Kauffman's production doesn't always feel especially real, but it's brisk and poised, offering reliably expert performances from Frank Wood, as the Hideaway's proprietor, and Peter Friedman, as a former client who wants to move in permanently. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

**Verité**

The playwright Nick Jones ("The Coward") is no foam-finger fan of realism. He roots for the surreal and the hyperreal, the grotesque and the gross. But in this LCT3 comedy, he's created two slightly sinister Nordic publishers (Matt McGrath and Robert Sella) with a positive fetish for authenticity. They decline the fantasy epic about a "simple farm dwarf" that Jo (Anna Camp), a New Jersey mom, has penned, but they like her authorial voice, and they're offering a hefty advance on a misery memoir, provided she supplies some genuine misery. Or maybe they can supply it for her. If these characters are mostly familiar types, they're adroitly played. Camp, of "True Blood," does the Barbie-with-a-titanium-core thing often, and well. But under Moritz von Stuelpnagel's direction, Jo's absurdist attempts to make best-seller art from her not-even-midlist life have an oddly cheerless feel. (Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)



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# CLASSICAL



The Met Museum projects "La Celestina," an operatic film, on the walls of the Vélez Blanco Patio.

## SPRING PREVIEW

Major institutions are focussing on audience appeal with uncommon intensity this spring. At the **New York Philharmonic**, Alan Gilbert's emphasis is resolutely on contemporary music. Gilbert will personally lead performances of Esa-Pekka Salonen's "Nyx" (March 19-20 and March 24); the world premiere of John Adams's "Scheherazade.2," a symphony for violin and orchestra featuring Leila Josefowicz (March 26-28); a new concerto for violin and oboe by Thierry Escaich, with the violinist (and Philharmonic favorite) Lisa Batiashvili and her husband, the oboist François Leleux, as soloists (April 8-11); and the U.S. premiere of "Senza Sangue," a one-act opera by the Hungarian modernist Peter Eötvös that features the mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter and the baritone Russell Braun (May 8-9).

At Carnegie Hall, "**Before Bach**" offers a feast of works by the great composers, such as Cavalli and Purcell, who flourished in the Renaissance and early-Baroque periods. Hard to pass up will be concerts by such acclaimed musicians as Jordi Savall and Le Concert des Nations (April 13 and April 16), Peter Phillips and the Tallis Scholars (April 17-18), and the English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir, led by their founder, John Eliot Gardner (including Monteverdi's "Orfeo," on May 1).

One of the most intriguing productions this spring combines early and contemporary music while mixing in elements of opera, film, and sound art. "**La Celestina**," a collaboration between the production company Erratica, the composer Matt Rogers, and the Chicago puppetry company Manual Cinema, is a fantastical exploration of the shadowy sexual intrigue of Fernando de Rojas's fifteenth-century Spanish novel. It will be projected in twenty-minute loops on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum's Vélez Blanco Patio (March 20-29).

—Russell Platt

## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

Rossini's exceedingly lovely "**La Donna del Lago**," based on the ur-Romantic Walter Scott poem that's set near a misty Scottish loch, trades in the typical operatic love triangle for a quadrangle. Elena, the titular "Lady of the Lake," enchants a motley trio of suitors—King James V (the elegant Juan Diego Flórez), the chief of the Highlanders, Rodrigo (John Osborn, looking for all the world like Mel Gibson in "Braveheart"), and the young upstart Malcolm (Daniela Barcellona, in a pants role)—with a unique combination of beauty, dignity, and personal warmth. Fortunately, the Met has found just the right artist for the role in Joyce DiDonato, whose singing is handsome, stylish, and fiercely precise, even if her top notes emerge with difficulty. Paul Curran's insubstantial production looks like it was designed and rehearsed on a shoestring, but the conductor, Michele Mariotti, leads the orchestra with quicksilver grace. (March 7 at 8 and March 10 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** The season's final two performances of "**Carmen**" feature an important addition to the cast: the charismatic tenor Jonas Kaufmann, who replaces Roberto Alagna in the role of Don José. Elina Garanča continues to sing the title role, heading a cast that also features Ailyn Pérez as Micaëla and Gábor Bretz as Escamillo. Louis Langrée, Mostly Mozart's music director, is on the podium. (March 4 at 7:30 and March 7 at 1.) • The Bartlett Sher production of "**Les Contes d'Hoffmann**," already revived this season as an effective vehicle for the young superstar tenor Vittorio Grigolo, returns with a completely new cast, led by the Met's éminence grise, James Levine. The fine lyric tenor Matthew Polenzani takes the title role; Karine Deshayes is Nicklausse; Laurent Naouri sings the Four Villains; and Audrey Luna, Susanna Phillips, and Elena Maximova portray the ill-fated subjects of Hoffmann's erotic obsessions. (March 5 at 7:30.) • The New York Philharmonic's Alan Gilbert conducts "**Don Giovanni**," pacing a cast that features not only the established Met star Peter Mattei, in the title role, but also such fine singers as Elza van den Heever, Jennifer Check, Kate Lindsey, and Luca Pisaroni. (March 6 at 7:30. This is the final performance.) • Vittorio Grigolo, who did excellent work earlier this season in the title role of "Les Contes d'Hoffmann," makes another foray into French opera, this time singing Des Grieux in Massenet's "**Manon**," an extraordinarily lithe and sumptuous score. The sparkling Diana Damrau is Manon, one of opera's most headstrong and reckless young women, and Russell Braun is Lescart; Emmanuel Villaume. (March 9 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

### BAM: "Semele"

In 2006, City Opera put a dizzily entertaining spin on Handel's luxurious score, an English-language opera about a socially ambitious young beauty who catches the eye of Jupiter, with fatal results. Now the prominent Chinese artist Zhang Huan has audaciously replaced Semele's palace with an actual four-hundred-and-fifty-year-old Ming-dynasty temple (weighing seventeen tons), which will be reconstructed on the stage of the Howard Gilman Opera House; with equal daring, he intersects Handel and Congreve's plot with the true-life story of a Chinese man who murdered one of his wife's lovers. The controversial result, presented by the singers and players of the Canadian Opera Company, features the coloratura soprano Jane Archibald in the title role, with Christopher Moulds conducting. (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. bam.org. March 4, March 6, and March 10 at 7:30 and March 8 at 3.)



## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic: "Contact!: New Music from Nordic Countries"

Alan Gilbert and Courtney Lewis, the orchestra's assistant conductor, lead a chamber orchestra drawn from the Philharmonic's ranks in its next new-music adventure, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Eric Bartlett is the soloist in the Cello Concerto No. 2, "Momentum," by the distinguished Danish composer Per Nørgård (the latest winner of the Philharmonic's Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music), the centerpiece of a concert that also features works by Kalevi Aho, Đuro Zivković, and Kaija Saariaho (the U.S. premiere of the string-orchestra version of her string quartet "Terra Memoria"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 7 at 7:30.)

### Met Chamber Ensemble

Another of the city's great ensembles goes small this week. James Levine leads this occasional assemblage of musicians from the Met Orchestra in a typically demanding program: works by Stravinsky (the Octet), Ives, Carter (the world premiere of "The American Sublime," a song cycle based on Wallace Stevens poems and one of the composer's final works), Cage ("Atlas Eclipticalis"), and Charles Wuorinen. The singers include the soprano Sharon Harms and the bass-baritone Evan Hughes. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 8 at 5.)

### "Defiant Requiem"

This unique concert presentation—combining live music, film, and dramatic narration—is the passion project of the noted American conductor Murry Sidlin; it commemorates the lives of Jewish prisoners at the Terezín concentration camp, who somehow, in the midst of enormous suffering, put on sixteen performances of Verdi's Requiem, reclaiming their humanity and fostering hope. Sidlin and the orchestra are joined by the Collegiate Chorale, the eminent actors Bebe Neuwirth and John Rubinstein, and a group of vocal soloists that includes the Metropolitan Opera soprano Jennifer Check and the tenor Steven Tharp. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. March 9 at 7:30.)

## RECITALS

### Joshua Bell

Having left the realm of contemporary music to more intrepid spirits (such as Leila Josefowicz and Hilary Hahn), this distinctive violinist is following in the footsteps of Itzhak Perlman, performing classical chestnuts with rare beauty and technical aplomb. Sam Haywood, his longtime pianist, joins him at Alice Tully Hall to perform sonatas by Beethoven (No. 4 in A Minor), Grieg, and Brahms (No. 1 in G Major), as well as Bartók's Rhapsody No. 1 for Violin and Piano. (212-721-6500. March 4 at 7:30.)

### Anna Caterina Antonacci

Lincoln Center may let its hair down during the annual White Light Festival, but its "Art of the Song" series walks a conservative line with an array of illustrious, world-class singers. Antonacci, a soprano of surpassing elegance who has never appeared at the Met but who has found a home at Alice Tully Hall, is accompanied by Donald Sulzen in masterworks of French song by Berlioz, Debussy ("Chansons de Bilitis"), Duparc, and Ravel, along with two works by Poulenc: the seldom heard "La Fraîcheur et le Feu" and the pièce de résistance, the searing monodrama "La Voix Humaine." (212-721-6500. March 5 at 7:30.)

### Miller Theatre "Composer Portrait": Augusta Read Thomas

Two of the leading young forces for contemporary music in America—the JACK Quartet and Third Coast Percussion—team up to celebrate the

achievements of Thomas, long the master of an intricate and colorful modernist style. The New York premiere of "Resounding Earth," a work involving more than three hundred percussion instruments, lies at the heart of a concert that also includes an excerpt from the string quartet "Sun Threads" and two world premieres. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 5 at 8.)

### Kronos Quartet

A Kronos concert always includes a fascinating array of new music; the high point of this one is the New York premiere of Aleksandra Vrebalov's "Beyond Zero: 1914-1918," a work (with film by Bill Morrison) that draws on the composer's own experiences in the war-torn Balkans of the nineteen-nineties. Music by Bryce Dessner and world premieres by Derek Charke and Merlijn Twaalfhoven are also featured. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 7 at 9.)

### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

A group of the Society's exceptional string players (including the violinists Ida Kavafian and Arnaud Sussmann) gather to offer a program of works both erudite and impassioned by Martinů, Ravel (the Sonata for Violin and Cello), and Mozart (the Duo in G Major for Violin and Viola and the String Quintet in G Minor, K 516). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. March 8 at 5.)

### András Schiff

An avowed critic of the growing right-wing political tendencies in his native Hungary, this mercurial yet commanding pianist flies above the fray when he sits down at his instrument. A pair of powerhouse recitals at Carnegie Hall range over a collection of late sonatas by Haydn, Beethoven (Opp. 109 and 110), and Schubert (including the Sonata in A Major, D. 959). (carnegiehall.org. March 10 and March 12 at 8.)

## WINDHAM CAMPBELL PRIZES

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## DANCE



The snap-pop contortions of flex head uptown, in "FLEXN," at the Park Avenue Armory.

### SPRING PREVIEW

Amazing physical feats that evoke animated special effects—gliding on the tips of toes, the surreal twisting of joints—are some of the elements that define the street-dance form called flex. It emerged in Brooklyn in the early nineties, on the streets and in the dance halls of East New York. Now flex is coming uptown. In **"FLEXN,"** at the Park Avenue Armory (March 25–April 4), personal stories and reflections on such events as the killing of Eric Garner—expressed through dance—are woven together by the dancers, in collaboration with the directors, Peter Sellars and the flex choreographer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray.

Liz Gerring's dances are clean, athletic, and elegant. Beneath their gleaming surface, one detects such influences as Merce Cunningham (in the witty footwork) and Trisha Brown (in the fluid use of the upper body), but the way that Gerring's choreography suggests weather patterns and other natural phenomena is unique to her. For **"Glacier"** (at the Joyce March 31–April 2), performed by Liz Gerring Dance Company, Gerring paired up with the composer Michael Schumacher, whose minimalist score is suffused with sounds recorded at Glacier Lake, in Colorado. Surrounded by this aural fog and bathed in cool, shifting light, the dancers look like beautiful creatures skimming across a frozen expanse.

Michelle Dorrance, whose company, Dorrance Dance, brings **"The Blues Project"** to the Joyce (April 4–5), has tap chops to spare. Her show is like the best kind of party: a fiddler plays; in addition to tap, there's zydeco, Appalachian flatfooting, Lindy Hop, and about ten other styles of dance. Dorrance has put together a topflight group of dancers, including the phenomenal Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, and musicians, led by Toshi Reagon, and she gives them room to swing.

—Marina Harss



### Malpaso Dance Company

After a successful American debut, last year, the Havana-based ensemble is back in town. Malpaso was founded in 2012 by expats from the more established Danza Contemporánea de Cuba. The dancers, some trained at the national ballet school, are appealing, extroverted, and strong. Their style combines an Afro-Cuban vibe with a more pared-down contemporary aesthetic. At the Joyce, they'll perform a new work by the upbeat American choreographer Trey McIntyre, and another by the troupe's own artistic director, Osnel Delgado. The latter is set to music by the Latin jazz composer Arturo O'Farrill, to be performed live by O'Farrill and his band. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 3-8.)

### Ballet Flamenco Sara Baras

On her previous visits to New York, this Spanish star of flamenco delivered productions that seemed to have more style than substance. Her technique is formidable, and her choreography is elegantly presented, yet it all rings hollow. "Voces, Suite Flamenca," a fairly traditional collection of numbers with a large cast of dancers and musicians, closes out City Center's three-week festival of Latin dance. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 4-7.)

### "Platform 2015: Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets"

This week, the series curated by the critic Claudia LaRocco includes these two duos: Sterling Hyltin and Jodi

Melnick, and Sara Mearns and Ra-shaun Mitchell (formerly of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company). (Dance Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 5-7.)

### "Salute to Betty Carter"

This celebration of the late iconoclastic jazz singer is principally a music concert, featuring the talents of the terrific young vocalist Charene Wade amid such distinguished former associates of the honoree as Craig Handy and Jacky Terrasson. But it also includes the incisive tap dancing of Michela Marino Lerman and the sister duo Alexandria and Frances Bradley. The Carter tribute they presented with Wade at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola in October—a too

rare invitation of hoofers into the self-dubbed House of Jazz—was a blast. (Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. March 6-7.)

### Vicky Shick Dance

If God is in the details, Shick is pretty close to divine. Her choreography, generally small in scale and narrow in emotional range, may be pedestrian or peculiar, but it is always particular, often captivatingly so. This holds for "Pathétique/Miniatures in Detail," which premiered at the West End Theatre last April and is being reprised for the Harkness Dance Festival. The fine cast of four includes the ever-subtle choreographer, now in her early sixties, and the more forceful Omagbitse Omagbemi. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 6-8.)



### TABLES FOR TWO

## TUOME

536 E. 5th St. (646-833-7811)

**YOU MAY NEVER BE CERTAIN** you are saying the name of this restaurant correctly. Vaguely foreign, it is pronounced "TOE-mee," which is how the chef Thomas Chen's parents, immigrants from China, said his nickname, Tommy. Chen, thirty years old, is a New York native and has cooked at Commerce and Eleven Madison Park; now he has his own ingredient-driven, sans-serif venture. As is the case with so many young people striking out on their own, his first quarters, in the East Village, are tight, and the two spare dining rooms reflect the neighborhood's no-frills sensibility. The food is fusion with a straight face—"contemporary American" with strong Asian influences in every dish.

The menu is not intimidating. In the bluntly titled "small" category, the devilled, panko-crusted egg topped with mounds of chili is a must. A recent execution produced a series of sublime sensations, from the crunch of crumbs to the bounce of the whites to the spike of spice, interrupted ever so slightly by a garnish of micro Thai basil. A lone curl of octopus arrives looking positively vertebral, until it meets a foam the color of buttercream—a fingerling-potato-and-brown-butter emulsion, released from the nozzle of an iSi cream whipper. The tentacle rests atop a bed of caramelized chopped pork XO, a spiced concoction that gives the meat a fishy taste—a clever match for octopus, the meatiest of seafoods.

Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$23-\$49.

## FOOD & DRINK

"Big" dishes are straightforward: chicken, beef, and fish. Chicken arrives two ways: sous-vide then pan-seared, and fried. Paired with charred lettuce and arranged atop a basil-jus-sweetened, congeelike rice porridge, it narrowly escapes entrée fatigue, even if the breast is dry. Beef short rib with sweet-potato purée is *déjà mangé*—a luxuriously tender iteration of meat and potatoes. The standout dish is a humble side of sticky rice, leavened with duck fat, served steaming on a lotus leaf. You will spend the rest of the evening digging for coins of spicy sausage you may have missed.

Tuome is unstuffy and comfortable, and its food is comforting. You could order all of these things and have a very fine dinner, finished with beignets made less bland by goat's-milk caramel, red-bean-glazed ice cream, and citron marmalade. Or you could live a little, and try the "Pig Out (for Two)": ten perfect squares of Berkshire pork belly, served with two individual bowls of spicy peanut noodles. The skin is as crisp as a hard candy shell, and cracks apart to reveal a perfect packet of rich, fatty meat, all sweetened with a drizzle of hoisin.

It's forty-nine dollars; don't overthink it.

—Silvia Killingsworth





# IT'S WHAT I DO

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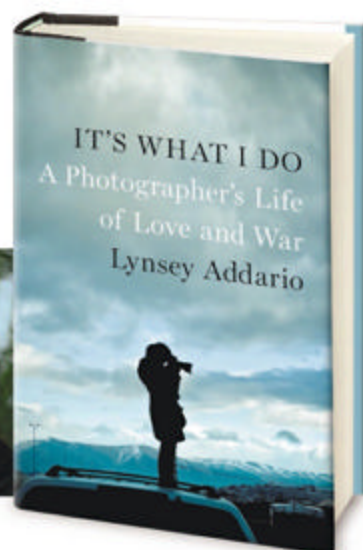
—TIM WEINER, author of *Legacy of Ashes and Enemies*

"Riveting, unforgettable."

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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT HARD CASES

The great Supreme Court cases turn on the majestic ambiguities embedded in the Constitution. It is not a simple thing to define and apply terms like “the freedom of speech,” or “equal protection of the laws,” much less explain how much process is “due.” Still, the Justices, in their best moments, have explicated these terms in ways that ennobled the lives of millions. This week, the Court will hear arguments in a momentous case, *King v. Burwell*, a challenge to a central feature of the Affordable Care Act. But, in contrast to other landmarks in Supreme Court history, the *King* case is notable mostly for the cynicism at its heart. Instead of grandeur, there is a smallness about this lawsuit in every way except in the stakes riding on its outcome.

Shortly after the A.C.A. passed, in 2010, a group of conservative lawyers met at a conference in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute, and scoured the nine-hundred-page text of the law, looking for grist for possible lawsuits. Michael Greve, a board member of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a libertarian outfit funded by, among others, the Koch brothers, said, of the law, “This bastard has to be killed as a matter of political hygiene. I do not care how this is done, whether it’s dismembered, whether we drive a stake through its heart, whether we tar and feather it and drive it out of town, whether we strangle it.” In time, lawyers hired by the C.E.I. discovered four words buried in Section 36B, which refers to the exchanges—now known as marketplaces—where people can buy health-insurance policies. The A.C.A. created federal tax subsidies for those earning less than a certain income to help pay for their premiums and other expenses, and, in describing who is eligible, Section 36B refers to exchanges “established by the State.” However, thirty-

four states, most of them under Republican control, refused to create exchanges; for residents of such states, the law had established a federal exchange. But, according to the conjurings of the C.E.I. attorneys, the subsidies should be granted only to people who bought policies on the state exchanges, because of those four words in Section 36B. The lawyers recruited plaintiffs and filed a lawsuit; their goal is to revoke the subsidies provided to the roughly seven and a half million people who were left no choice by the states where they live but to buy on the federal exchange.

The claim borders on the frivolous. The plaintiffs can’t assert that the A.C.A. violates the Constitution, because the Justices narrowly upheld the validity of the law in 2012. Rather, the suit claims that the Obama Administration is violating the terms of its own law. But the A.C.A. never even suggests that customers on the federal exchange are ineligible for subsidies. In fact, there’s a provision that says that, if a state refuses to open an exchange, the federal government will “establish and operate such Exchange within the State.” The congressional debate over the A.C.A. included fifty-three meetings of the

Senate Finance Committee and seven days of committee debates on amendments. The full Senate spent twenty-five consecutive days on it, the second-longest session ever on a single piece of legislation. There were similar marathons in the House. Yet no member of Congress ever suggested that the subsidies were available only on the state exchanges. This lawsuit is not an attempt to enforce the terms of the law; it’s an attempt to use what is at most a semantic infelicity to kill the law altogether.

During Obama’s remaining time in office, more challenges to his legacy, like the *King* case, will work their way through the courts. Even before Republicans took full control of Congress





earlier this year, the legislative process had basically come to a halt; now, if the G.O.P. manages to pass laws in both houses, they will likely be met by Presidential vetoes. So Obama's adversaries have taken their agenda to federal judges, who are nearly as politically polarized as the legislators in Congress. Last month, Republican officeholders in twenty-six states chose to bring a challenge to the President's immigration plan before Judge Andrew S. Hanen, an outspoken conservative in Brownsville, Texas. On procedural rather than constitutional grounds, Hanen ordered a nationwide hold on the plan, which is a crucial element of the President's program for his second term.

In a human sense as much as in a legal one, the stakes in *King v. Burwell* dwarf those of the immigration lawsuit and, indeed, most cases in the history of the Supreme Court. If the Justices rule for the plaintiffs, the seven and a half million people on the federal exchange who receive tax subsidies will lose them immediately, which means that most of them will also lose their insurance, because they can no longer afford it. Insurance companies will then likely raise rates for the remaining policyholders, many of whom would drop their coverage, leading to even higher rates, and so on; this sequence is known as the A.C.A. death spiral. A remarkable coalition of state officials, insurance companies, hospitals, physicians,

and nurses—many among them less than friendly to the Obama Administration—have filed briefs in the case warning of the consequences if the subsidies are withdrawn. A brief written by the deans of nineteen leading schools of public health states with bracing directness that, if the plaintiffs win this case, nearly ten thousand Americans will die unnecessary deaths each year.

In a more civilized era—even the nineteen-nineties—Congress routinely passed technical fixes to major laws, in order to remove minor ambiguities, like the one that is arguably present in the A.C.A. For example, in 1999, with little controversy or notice, Congress made small changes in the Children's Health Insurance Program, two years after its original passage. But that largeness of spirit has vanished from Congress, so it falls once again to the Supreme Court to determine the future of the A.C.A. The Justices all have well-developed views about the Constitution, and strong preferences about how our understanding of it should evolve. But their decision in the mean-spirited lawsuit that is *King v. Burwell* will reflect little on the interpretive schools to which they belong. The Court will have many more chances to define the Constitution for the ages. In this case, though, the Justices' choice is a simple one: life or death.

—Jeffrey Toobin

## ANGRY YOUNG MEN MORNING IN MIDWOOD



With the arrest last week of two Brooklyn roommates who were allegedly on their way to Syria to join ISIS, water-cooler conversation around town turned, once again, to the secret lives of youths. “Young people, they don’t have much to lose. They can easily be brainwashed,” Ali Soufan, a former F.B.I. agent who runs the Soufan Group, a security firm that tracks Islamic extremism, said. So what makes them join a jihadist movement? Before their arrest, Akhror Saidakhmetov, nineteen, who worked in electronics kiosks, and Abdurasul Juraboev, twenty-four, who had a job chopping vegetables at the Gyro King on Foster Avenue, resided in Midwood, a diverse neighborhood of Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and immigrants from Poland and South and Central Asia.

The arrests flew in the face of the local conventional wisdom. At the Gyro King, a Pakistani man in a hoodie and sweatpants said, “The young people

here? Mostly they’re staying at home, because their parents don’t let them do stuff. They go to school and home. That’s it.” A man at a visa service on Coney Island Avenue painted a similar picture: “Young people here are *good*. They don’t go out drinking.”

A twenty-year-old Jamaican man named Shakwan, who was working the counter at a gym down the block, had a different take. “It’s a boiling pot,” he said. “Is that what they say?” He lives nearby and has friends of every nationality, he said. “Arabs, Pakistanis. For a while, I was the only black kid.” Juraboev is from Uzbekistan and Saidakhmetov is from Kazakhstan.

Shakwan didn’t know them, but he said that the Gyro King is popular with local kids. “They make cheesesteaks, too. That’s the secret.” (The restaurant’s Yelp reviews confirm Shakwan’s assessment of the food: “When I see people say that there was roaches in the meal that is ridiculous. They are confusing it for a cardamom that looks different but it’s not a roach very delicious food I recommend it to everyone.”)

Shakwan questioned the idea that the local teens are all quiet and dutiful. “To be honest with you? They all smoke,” he said, referring to marijuana. “You might think that it doesn’t happen,

but, trust me, everybody does it.” Hang-out spots include Junior’s Pizza and Fried Chicken, the Kent movie theatre, and local basements, where teen-agers play video games like *Call of Duty*. Coney Island, where Juraboev was recorded as saying he’d like to plant a car bomb, if instructed by ISIS, is a Friday-night destination. “It’s a landmark. People go there to drink,” Shakwan said.

With so many different cultures, dating can be complicated. “My mom wants to know where I am all the time,” Shakwan said. “My Pakistani friends, they mess around with any girl—black, white, whatever. But they know they can only bring home Pakistani girls to their parents.” Flirting, he said, happens on Facebook. “Girls love the Internet.”

Shakwan said that a Pakistani friend had told him about another Pakistani, a nineteen-year-old whose roommate, after a year, admitted that he was a police operative and moved out. “He just got up one day and said, ‘I’m a cop,’ and left.” (Apparently he hadn’t found anything incriminating.)

Shakwan said he’d seen postings about jihadism on Facebook by people he knew. He’d seen the videos of beheadings. Of the local kids lured into



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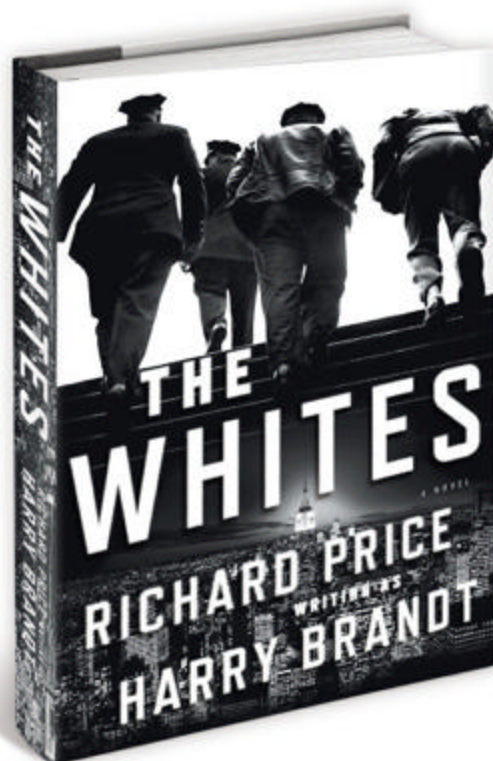
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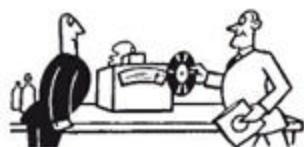
radicalism, he said, “They’ve got to be immature. This is just like regular gangs, but on the Internet.” He’d seen classmates join gangs in high school. “It was always the quiet kid,” he said. “They’re scared, and they want to feel protected,” or they’re looking for friendship. “I call them fake friends.”

Soufan, the ex-F.B.I. agent, said that impulsivity was a problem. “Young people see videos on YouTube, they see speeches and sermons, they get really emotional,” he said. “They don’t think, Is this a legitimate narrative, a legitimate religion? They don’t think about whether it’s the right thing to do.”

Shakwan hopes to become a police officer someday, and he admires the agents who made the arrests. “I want to be a cop so bad,” he said. He thought that the saddest thing about Juraboiev’s predicament was that, at his job at the Gyro King, he worked in the basement. Shakwan used to work as a valet-parking attendant. “I had to stay in the basement, too, to watch the cars. My phone didn’t get a signal. I was just looking at cars. It gets lonely.”

—Lizzie Widdicombe

## THE MUSICAL LIFE ALL THAT JAZZ



Imagine Dragons, the Las Vegas rock band, was in town recently to promote its new album, “Smoke + Mirrors.” On a night off, the band’s members decided to check out Fat Cat, a jazz, pool, and shuffleboard joint in the West Village that Dan Platzman, the drummer, had heard about.

“So, Platz,” Wayne Sermon, the group’s long-haired guitar player, said as their hired van pulled away from the Dream Hotel, on West Fifty-fifth Street. “This is a jazz place? Is it good jazz?” Sermon has a deep, rumbling voice; when he talks, he sounds as if he were giving a sermon.

“It’s diverse,” Platz said. “It could be wanky.”

“Oh, if it’s jazz it *will* be wanky.”

Sermon trained as a jazz guitarist,

which gives him license to say that. He and Platz and Ben McKee, the bassist, all met at Berklee College of Music, in Boston, where they played in a variety of jazz ensembles before becoming, improbably, one of the biggest rock bands of the moment. Still, the three jazz guys in the band are ambivalent about the “rock” label.

In the van, the Berkleeites spoke to one another in a kind of private shorthand. The band’s front man, Dan Reynolds, who writes the songs with Sermon, remained aloof. Tall and stalwart and not at all wanky, Reynolds dropped out of Brigham Young University; he met the others after they graduated from music school. He was listening intently to Drake’s new album, “If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late,” on his iPhone. Released without fanfare (a far cry from the eight million dollars or so that Target spent on a four-minute Imagine Dragons promo spot during the Grammys), Drake’s record was looking as if it might beat “Smoke + Mirrors” to the top of the album charts.

*I got enemies, got a lot of enemies,* Drake sang.

“This song is super-aimed at haters,” Reynolds observed to the others. “He’s headlining Coachella and he got all this shit for it from the hipsters.”

Drake: *I got bitches asking me about the code for the WiiUfi...*

“I love his phrasing,” Reynolds said, his ear close to his phone.

He predicted that Drake would sell more than four hundred thousand albums that week.

“Wow,” Sermon murmured.

Three years ago, when the band was working on its first album, “Night Visions,” the members were still playing parties in Vegas casinos. (Their explosive percussive style, heard especially on the “Smoke + Mirrors” title track, evolved in order to be heard above the clanging of slot machines.) This time around, Imagine Dragons are Top 40 stars, playing arenas. Did they feel any pressure to prove that “Night Visions,” which went double platinum, wasn’t a fluke?

“Not until everyone started asking us if we feel pressure,” Sermon said.

The van had come to a standstill next to the Hard Rock Café. “Guys,” Platz said. “Look.” A huge picture of

the four of them was on the Hard Rock’s electronic marquee.

“Wow, Times Square got a lot cooler since it showed me pictures of myself,” McKee said.

It was the day after Valentine’s Day, and each band member had gone to a different restaurant the night before, with a girlfriend or a spouse.

“I don’t know where you guys went last night, but I went somewhere better,” Sermon declared, as the van started moving again. “Casa Mono’s Valentine’s Day menu, inspired by the paintings of Salvador Dalí. The very first dish we had was called Sodomizer. It’s a ba-



Imagine Dragons

quette with a bunch of crispy baguettes stuffed into it. And then you dip it in the lard of that famous Spanish ham and add squash purée.”

“Whoa!” his bandmates said.

Reynolds had gone to Nobu. “Mine cost double the amount of Wayne’s and was maybe half as good,” he said. “And because it was Valentine’s Day everything was topped with this jellied, slurp-down-the-throat kind of stuff. And, dude, I love sushi!”

“But that’s not what Nobu does,” Platz said. “It’s the prepared dishes. The black cod.”

Down at Fat Cat, a ragtime band was playing, featuring a guy on banjo. Platz tried to line up a game of pool or shuffleboard, but there was a long wait, so the band opted for Scrabble. Reynolds was hungry and walked down to Bleecker Street for some pizza. The others discussed the ragtime band



while setting up the Scrabble board.

"See, it's diverse!" Platz said. Sermon seemed unimpressed. "The only jazz guitarist Wayne likes is Bill Frisell," Platz said.

McKee said, "This does make me feel like I'm back in school."

"What, Scrabble?" Sermon asked.

"No. Jazz."

—John Seabrook

## A FAN'S NOTES

### BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS



A few weeks ago, Irving Bierman, a seventy-two-year-old Brooklyn native, sent an e-mail to James Dolan, the owner of the Knicks. "As a Knicks fan for in excess of sixty years, I am utterly embarrassed," Bierman wrote. The team had the N.B.A.'s worst record even before Carmelo Anthony, its best player, decided that knee surgery sounded more appealing than finishing a season in which ESPN had replaced a scheduled Knicks broadcast with a celebrity bowling tournament. Last week, Phil Jackson, the team's president and resident mystic, declared that the Knicks were giving the basketball gods "heartburn." Bierman went on, "You have done a lot of utterly STUPID business things with the franchise. Please NO MORE." The stress of the season seemed to have got to Dolan, too. He responded to Bierman personally. "You are a sad person. . . . I'll bet your life is a mess," Dolan wrote in an e-mail that was reprinted by Deadspin, and went on to insinuate that Bierman had a drinking problem, while trumpeting his own sobriety of twenty-one years. "Start rooting for the Nets because the Knicks don't want you."

The good news for Bierman: he now lives in Myrtle Beach, and hasn't suffered through any games in person this season. The same cannot be said for Dennis Doyle, a thirty-two-year-old graduate of Georgetown Law School, who, last spring, got dumped by his girlfriend, lost his job, and somehow made things worse by deciding this was all a sign that he should deplete his savings



in order to attend every single one of the Knicks' games this season. His sister, a life coach, gave her blessing; his father, a lawyer, did not. As is the modern man's wont, Doyle started a blog documenting his journey. A recent post began, "This is starting to get difficult."

"My timing has never been great," Doyle said, settling into his seat at the Garden before a recent game. He was referring both to his mid-recession law-school graduation—the only job he could find was one representing co-ops in disputes with hot-dog vendors operating too close to their entrances—and to the fact that he had spent twenty-five thousand dollars on flights, hotels, and tickets. Doyle's costs rise with each palliative arena beer, but he had come down with a bug that day, and was popping Tylenol instead. "This is my flu game," Doyle said. He wore a down jacket with a fur-trimmed hood, which he kept on, and shielded his eyes as strobes went off during the roster introductions. "If I'm lucky, I'll have a seizure," he said, between snuffles.

With the season lost, Doyle had been trying to enjoy the travel. When the Knicks played in London, in the middle of a sixteen-game losing streak, he took an extra day to visit Stonehenge. ("Still a mystery why its architects engaged in such a laborious endeavor," he said. "I can relate.") At a casino in Cleveland, where Doyle was trying to recoup his losses, he spotted Charles Oakley, his all-time favorite Knick, at a craps table. "I got a pretty blank stare," Doyle said, describing Oakley's reaction upon hearing about his quest. Morris Bart, a personal-injury attorney in Louisiana, was more empathetic after reading Doyle's blog, and

offered him courtside seats for the Knicks game in New Orleans, on the condition that Doyle submit to a lecture about why he should return to the law.

Doyle hoped to avoid that fate, but he said that he was prepared to offer his services, pro bono, to a cause advocated in an op-ed in the *Observer* by a fellow-lawyer, who cited court decisions from three different centuries to argue that New York City could use eminent domain to take over the Knicks as a blighted property. "There's a little bit of North Korea to the way this team is run," Doyle said. He suspected the team of attempting to pacify the masses—the frequency of in-game T-shirt tosses seemed to increase as the season wore on—and hoped that a pseudoscandal like Dolan's intemperate e-mail would foment regime change. "What I wouldn't give for him to get caught up in some kind of Donald Sterling thing," Doyle said. (Adam Silver, the N.B.A.'s commissioner, declined to sanction Dolan's behavior. "Jim is a consummate New Yorker," Silver wrote. "Jim got an unkind email and responded with an unkind email.")

Doyle had passed the season's halfway point, and remained committed to attending every game, despite the fact that he had yet to find a single friend who was willing to join him at the Garden. He had, however, found an agent, who sees promise in a blog-to-book deal, and has told him not to worry about the mounting losses. "At this point, it's actually in my best interest to root against the team," Doyle said, noting the market for books about overcoming adversity. "Hopefully, the suffering resonates."

—Reeves Wiedeman

## THE FINANCIAL PAGE

### GREECE'S NEXT MOVE

As soon as the battle between Greece and its creditors ended, with the two sides agreeing to a four-month extension of Greece's financial bailout, the battle over who had won began. Wolfgang Schäuble, the hard-line German finance minister, declared that the new Greek government, led by the leftist party Syriza, had been forced into a "date with reality." Greece's Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, called the agreement a "decisive step" that would help end austerity and lift the Greek economy from its deep depression, and the Greek public seemed largely pleased with the deal.

At first glance, Tsipras's positive comments look like spin. Syriza came to power vowing to win a reduction in Greece's enormous debt burden, to reject the budget commitments that the previous Greek government had made, and to liberate Greece from supervision by the so-called Troika—the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Commission—that has been vetting all the country's fiscal decisions in recent years. Yet the new agreement makes no provision for debt reduction. It says that the extension will take place only within "the framework of the existing arrangement." And Greece's plans will still be evaluated by the same three institutions. From that angle, the Greeks went 0 for 3.

If you look a little harder, though, you can see that Greece won important breathing room. Heading into the negotiations, the country faced budgetary targets for 2015 and 2016 that would have kept the economy stuck in recession—it has shrunk by thirty per cent since 2008—and prevented the government from doing anything about poverty levels that many observers say constitute a humanitarian crisis. The targets are now up for revision in future talks—a significant concession. According to Mark Weisbrot, the co-director of the Center for Economic Policy Research, "European officials were telling Greece it was their way or the highway. That's changed. I think Europe blinked." James Galbraith, an economics professor at the University of Texas at Austin who was in Athens and Brussels to assist the Greek team during the negotiations, told me, "Victory may be too strong a word. But you can certainly call it a successful skirmish. This has given Greece some room to maneuver. Not a lot, but more than it had before."

In essence, the agreement kicked the can down the road for four months—which suits Greece fine. In recent weeks, money had been pouring out of the country, leaving the banking system on the verge of collapse. And Syriza officials inherited an

administrative state that was barely functioning. As Galbraith said, "When they went to the Ministry of Finance for the first time, there was not a document, not a computer. The Wi-Fi was not turned on." Now Syriza has a little time to deliver on the promises it's made, both to voters and to Europe.

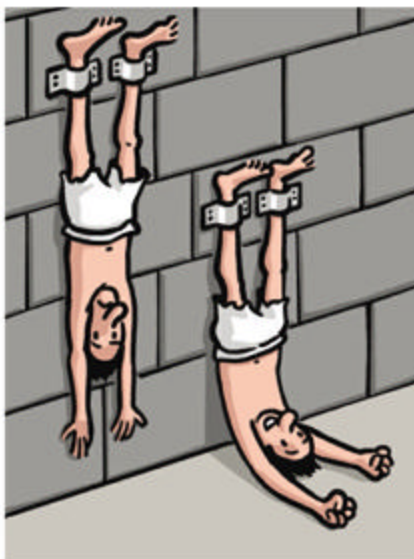
The real challenge is satisfying those two constituencies, which want very different things. And though there's space for negotiations, Greece is still in thrall to European institutions: both the E.C.B. and the I.M.F. have already voiced concerns about the reform plans that Greece submitted last Monday. If you owe three hundred billion euros and need Europe to save your banking system, you're bound to be supervised, but Greece has so far negotiated without its most powerful weapon—the threat of leaving the euro and defaulting on its debts. Such a move, known as the Grexit, was off the table, because Syriza had campaigned on staying in the eurozone, and polls show that this is what most Greeks want. But they may soon need to reconsider.

The conventional wisdom is that returning to the drachma would be a catastrophe for Greece. Certainly, it would be traumatic: there would be an immediate devaluation; the value of savings would tumble; the price of imported goods would soar. But Greek exports would become cheaper and labor costs even more competitive. Tourism would likely boom. And regaining control of its monetary and fiscal policy for the first time since 2001 would give Greece the chance to deal with its economic woes. Other countries that have endured sudden devaluations have often found that long-term gain outweighs short-term pain. When Argentina defaulted and devalued the peso, in 2001, months of economic chaos were followed by years of rapid growth. Iceland had a similar experience after the financial crisis.

The Greek situation would entail an entirely new currency rather than just a devaluation. Weisbrot says, "It could work. You have to go through a crisis, but then the economy would recover, and probably more quickly than people expect." Although Europe is much better equipped to deal with the economic consequences of a Grexit than it was three years ago, the political consequences would be devastating to the European project. That's why, even if Greece wants to stay in the euro, a credible Grexit threat could help keep Europe from pulling the leash tight again.

For now, Syriza will try to change Europe from within. The fight over Greece's budget isn't just a fight about finances; it's a fight about the ideology of austerity and about whether smaller countries will have a meaningful say in their own economic fate. As Weisbrot told me, "Countries like Greece have lost sovereign and democratic control over the most important macroeconomic policies that any country has. Greece is trying to take some of that control back." The skirmish may have been successful. The real battles are yet to come.

—James Surowiecki





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LETTER FROM BEIJING

# TRAVELS WITH MY CENSOR

*A Chinese book tour.*

BY PETER HESSLER



My Chinese censor is Zhang Jiren, an editor at the Shanghai Translation Publishing House, and last September he accompanied me on a publicity tour. It was the first time I'd gone on a book tour with my censor. When I rode the high-speed train from Shanghai to Beijing, Zhang sat beside me; at the hotel in Beijing, he stayed on the same floor. He sat in on my interviews with the Chinese media. He had even prepared the tour schedule on a spreadsheet, which was color-coded to represent five types of commitments, with days that lasted as long as thirteen hours. Other authors had warned me about such schedules, so before the tour

I sent Zhang a request for more free time. His response was prompt: "In my experience, the tours in China are always tough and exhausting. Hope you understand it."

And that was all—no adjustment, no apology. In China, there's a tendency toward brutal honesty, and even the censored media may tell you things you don't want to hear. During my tour, one major Shanghai newspaper, *Wenhui Daily*, ran a six-thousand-word profile that began with the sentence "Peter Hessler is now forty-five years old, and he's gotten a lot fatter, and he has wrinkles around the corners of his eyes." In Beijing, a television host finished his in-

terview, shut off the camera, and said, "To be honest, I liked your wife's book better than yours."

There are a couple of things that I should clarify. The first is that I weigh a hundred and fifty pounds. The second is that it's not really fair to describe Zhang Jiren as a censor. It's true that he makes my books politically acceptable to the Chinese authorities, but censorship is only one of his duties. Zhang directs the nonfiction division at Shanghai Translation, where he also has to find translators, edit manuscripts, gauge political risks, and handle publicity. He's thirty-seven years old but looks younger, a thin man with buzz-cut hair and owlish glasses. His background is in philosophy, and he wrote a master's thesis on Herbert Marcuse, the neo-Marxist thinker. Once, Zhang told me that he had studied Marcuse because his ideas are "a powerful tool for Chinese to resist the long-term propaganda campaigns."

On the tour, Zhang was omnipresent, not because he wanted to monitor me but because he was responsible for virtually everything that happened. And yet his presence was quiet: usually, he was off to the side, listening and observing but saying little. He always wore sneakers, an old T-shirt, and calf-length trousers, and this casual outfit, during thirteen-hour days, sometimes made me feel like I was being given a tour of Purgatory by a neo-Marxist grad student. But I appreciated the guidance. Recently, there have been a number of articles in the foreign press about Chinese censorship, with the tone highly critical of American authors who accept changes to their manuscripts in order to publish in mainland China. The articles tend to take a narrowly Western perspective: they rarely examine how such books are read by Chinese, and editors like Zhang are portrayed crudely, as Communist Party hacks. This was one reason I went on the tour—I figured that the best way to understand censorship is to spend a week with your censor.

Since Xi Jinping became President, in 2013, China has engaged in an increasingly repressive political crackdown. The authorities have also become more antagonistic toward the foreign press; it's now harder for journalists to renew their visas, and many report being hassled

*One reader said that the Chinese people adapt to censorship "in clever ways."*



by local authorities while on research trips. And yet the reading public has begun to discover nonfiction books about China by foreigners. More than any other editor, Zhang has tapped into this trend—all but one of his six best-selling titles in the past few years have been foreign books about China. In Zhang's opinion, this reflects the new worldliness of readers, which he believes says more about the country's long-term direction than the censorship or the propaganda does. "The Party turns left this year, and maybe it turns right this year," Zhang wrote to me in 2014. "In my opinion, the only certain thing is that Chinese people are much more individualized and open-minded."

In 1998, when I wrote "River Town," my first book, it was inconceivable that a foreigner's portrait of contemporary China would be published there, for reasons both political and commercial. There wasn't much of a market for books about China in the United States, either. I had just spent two years as a Peace Corps teacher at a college in Fuling, a small, remote city on the Yangtze River, and I finished the first draft without a contract. On the opening page, I wrote, "There was no railroad in Fuling. It had always been a poor part of Sichuan Province and the roads were bad. To go anywhere you took the boat, but mostly you didn't go anywhere." The word "poor" appeared thirty-six times in the book; I used "dirty" more than two dozen times. I never thought seriously about such details until a publisher accepted the manuscript.

After that, I sent a draft to two friends from Fuling: Emily Yang, one of my former students, who was a native of the town, and Adam Meier, another Peace Corps volunteer. Their comments were almost completely contradictory. Emily wrote, "I think no one would like Fuling city after reading your story. But I can't complain, as everything you write about is the fact. I wish the city would be more attractive with time." Meanwhile, Adam thought I had softened the portrayal. He was particularly concerned that I had omitted an incident that occurred near the end of our two years, when we went downtown with a video camera to record places that we wanted to remember. A crowd gathered

and accused us of being journalists filming images of poverty to show Americans, which was a common charge at that time. We explained that we were teachers, but the crowd turned violent, kicking and hitting us until we ran away.

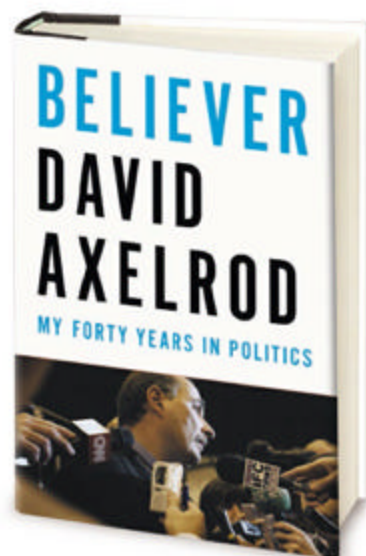
This was my most disturbing experience in Fuling, and I left it out of the first draft. One of the book's main themes was the slow, sometimes painful way in which we had been accepted by locals, and I worried about undermining this message with a description of the mob in the final chapter. But, after discussing it with Adam, I decided that the scene was necessary. And this set the tone for my editing: I corrected details that were wrong, but I didn't touch anything that felt honest or raw. I left the word "poor" on page 1 and everywhere else that it appeared. I decided, effectively, that I would ignore a certain emotional side of the likely Chinese response.

I realized that I might not be welcome in Fuling after the book appeared. At the end of 2000, about a month before publication, I made a final trip to visit friends. I attended the wedding of one of my favorite former students, and then I gave a talk at a remote middle school where another former student was teaching. Shortly after I began my lecture, policemen arrived from Chongqing, the regional capital. They announced that the event was cancelled and escorted me off the stage. I returned to Beijing, and the following week almost everybody I had visited in Fuling was interrogated. The police detained the bride and groom to ask about our friendship, and another student telephoned me, sounding confused. "Is it possible for the police to listen to what you say on the telephone?" he asked. "They knew all the things that you and I have been talking about recently."

After "River Town" came out in English, the government issued a command to the college in Fuling: Translate this book immediately. The project was assigned to Li Xueshun, a Communist Party member who was a teacher and a low-level administrator in the English department. He was the same age as me and during my first few weeks in the Peace Corps had seemed interested in friendship, inviting Adam and me to his home for lunch. But after that he became strangely evasive, and later I

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learned that older cadres had warned him against associating with the Americans. I described him in the book's opening pages: "He had the best spoken English in the college, but he was an uneasy young man in a new position of authority."

Li translated that sentence himself, along with the rest of the first two chapters. He served as editor for the book, with each of my former colleagues responsible for translating a section or two. The project was secret; nobody got in touch with me about it. The translators were never told which level of government had issued the command, or where the book would be sent. None of them ever saw a finished copy.

A few years after "River Town" appeared, Chinese publishers began to approach me about the possibility of a mainland edition. They acknowledged, though, that major changes would have to be made for political reasons, so I declined. I went on to write "Oracle Bones" and "Country Driving," completing a trilogy about China, and, as time passed, I became less comfortable with the fact that my books weren't available in the communities where I had lived and done research. Friends in Fuling sometimes

complained that they had heard about a version available only to cadres, and parts of other books were posted online, in unapproved translations that were often hasty or inaccurate.

In 2010, Zhang Jiren contacted me on behalf of Shanghai Translation, and said that the political climate was right to publish "Country Driving," a book that focussed on development in rural regions. In China, restrictions on publishing tend to ebb and flow, and 2010 was relatively quiet: Hu Jintao had been President for seven years, and the next transition was a couple of years away. I signed a contract, figuring that the window of opportunity might close. The initial print run was small, because the publisher believed that there would be limited interest in a foreigner's book about China. But "Country Driving" became a surprise best-seller, and a year later Shanghai Translation followed up with "River Town," which quickly sold more copies than it had in more than a decade in America.

The issue that once concerned me—the blunt portrayal of poverty—no longer seemed sensitive, because China had changed so quickly. "With the distance of time," Emily wrote me, in 2011, "everything in the book turns out to be

charming, even the dirty, tired flowers." On the recent book tour, reporters often mentioned nostalgia, and they said that the relentless pace of life in China made it hard to document details. "Sometimes in China you have this feeling of suffocation, and it's hard to notice all these things," Zhang Lijiao, a Beijing reporter for *China Youth Daily*, told me. "Maybe because you're a foreigner, you can be a little separate. Maybe it's easier to be still. We have a phrase, *yi bubian ying wanbian*"—you cope with change by staying the same. "If you don't move, then you notice everything moving around you."

These interviews were intense to the point of exhaustion. The journalists read the books and searched through old material with incredible thoroughness; one reporter showed up with an anthropology paper that I had written as an undergraduate, in 1991. There's new interest in nonfiction writing in China, and reporters asked highly technical questions: What's a set piece? How do you structure a longitudinal project? Toward the end of interviews, the mood often changed, with questions becoming broader and more searching. Do you believe that Chinese lack creativity? Do they need some faith or religion? What will be the outcome of the current political campaign?

One afternoon, I was interviewed by Sun Xiaoning, a forty-something reporter at the Beijing *Evening News*, and I remarked that, during my past few trips to China, people had seemed more reflective. "People are thinking more," she agreed. "It's like the slogans that you quote in your book. 'Development is the absolute principle!' We've seen that slogan for years. But now many people read it and think, Development is the absolute principle? It's a question, not a statement. Should we be going this way?"

She laughed when I began writing in my notebook. "On my way here, I thought, He's going to be observing me very closely," Sun said. "What's he going to notice? I knew you would be recording it."

In her article, she playfully described our encounter as *jiaoshou*—hand-to-hand combat. I mentioned to Zhang Jiren that people seemed more confident than I remembered, and he told



Karin

*"I find the ride goes a lot quicker when you have someone to try to convert."*



me that this was part of the reason foreign books have become popular. Shanghai Translation had recently published “Two Forbidden Cities,” a book by a Japanese journalist who compares the institutional cultures of the Forbidden City museums in Beijing and Taipei. The book was well received, which seemed remarkable—in the past, the only thing worse than an American writing about an undeveloped city like Fuling would have been a Japanese touching on the China-Taiwan issue.

Such openness was even more striking in the light of the over-all political climate. Reporters said that they felt more pressure now that Xi had come to power, and after interviews they sometimes wrote me to check quotes and explain things that couldn’t be published. Occasionally, we negotiated. An editor at one magazine asked to reprint an article I had written, but I told him that it had to include a key section that might be too sensitive. The magazine held an editorial meeting and decided that it wasn’t possible, so we compromised: they published a Q. and A. that referred to the article, which I posted in translation on my personal Web site. Only once were my words twisted for propaganda purposes. Long after the tour, a reporter asked me to do an interview for *China Daily*. The paper then removed selected material from the interview, ran it under my byline, and made it appear that I had written an op-ed in support of the government. When I complained, the editors removed the article from the English-language Web site but refused to issue a retraction. In the end, I should have known better, because *China Daily* is notorious for pushing the regime’s agenda, but after dozens of interviews I had grown complacent. And it was hard to gauge risks in a climate with such contradictory trends—individuals seemed more curious and open-minded, but the system had entered a phase of increased restriction.

One morning on the tour, there was a spare half hour, and I signed books in Zhang’s office. On his desk sat a manuscript about the early environmental movement in the U.S. It was one of a number of books from the sixties and seventies that Zhang is pub-


lishing. “America in the sixties was a little like China is now,” Zhang told me. “We’re just starting to have an environmental consciousness here.”

China doesn’t have a strong tradition of literary nonfiction, and Zhang, who previously handled philosophy and other academic subjects for Shanghai Translation, founded the nonfiction division, in 2010. He told me that one reason was economic—at that time, the state-owned publisher was being converted into a for-profit enterprise, and editors were pressured to sell more books. But there remains a strong academic and idealistic trend in Zhang’s titles. Last year, his seven-book list included “The Children of Sanchez,” a 1961 study of poverty and urbanization in Mexico City; “Discours de la Servitude Volontaire,” a sixteenth-century essay by a Frenchman in opposition to tyranny; and “A Companion to Marx’s Capital: Volume I.” This year’s list features “Central Problems in Social Theory,” “The Working Poor: Invisible in America,” and “The End of Economic Man: The Origins of Totalitarianism.”

While signing books in Zhang’s office, I chatted with him and two other young editors, and the conversation turned to translation. Somebody mentioned Sun Zhongxu, a translator who had committed suicide two weeks before. Sun had translated two novels by Richard Yates for the publisher, among other books, and his name often came up on my tour—people said that his work was brilliant. Mo Xiaomin, one of the young editors in Zhang’s office, said that Sun had suffered from depression, which she believed was connected to his translation work. “You don’t get paid well, and there isn’t much credit,” she said. “I wouldn’t want to do it.”

I mentioned that I had known more people who killed themselves in China than anywhere else. “That’s common,” Zhang said. There was a pause and he continued, “My grandfather killed himself when I was a child.” He explained that his grandfather, a high-school teacher, had been attacked for his political ideas during the Cultural Revolution. At the time, he tried to drown himself in a lake, but he lost heart at the last minute.


“Then many years later he tried again,” Zhang said. “We were living on the third floor of an apartment building



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here in Shanghai, and he climbed up to the fourth floor and jumped out a window.”

The room grew quiet. This was the kind of detail that I couldn't help but notice in China—the old man methodically making his way to the higher floor to make sure that this time he did it right. Zhang continued, “He was a math teacher. I was ten years old when this happened. I was very close to him.”

The two other editors were friends of Zhang, but they didn't say anything, and nobody asked a question. In China, such a silence could mean that he had often talked about the suicide, or it could mean that this was the first time he had ever mentioned it. Finally, the conversation moved on to something else, and the room seemed to warm up. I kept signing books.

At Shanghai Translation, each manuscript passes through three levels of political review: the editor, his supervisor, and the head of the company. Occasionally, the higher levels make a change, but the vast majority of censorship is handled by editors like Zhang. In 2013, when the *Times* ran an article about foreign authors publishing in China, it noted that “publishing houses are required to employ in-house censors, most of them faithful party members.” But this isn't accurate. At Shanghai Translation, there's no employee whose primary job is to monitor political content. Such a distinction may seem academic, but it matters greatly in a country with many types of political control. In China, newspapers and magazines are censored much more heavily than books, and state-run papers like *China Daily* actively promote the Party line. On the Internet, censors excise all references to certain taboo topics. But for an editor like Zhang, who is not a Party member, there is no ideology and no absolute list of banned subjects. His censorship is defensive: rather than promoting an agenda or covering up some specific truth, he tries to avoid catching the eye of a higher authority. In fact, his goal—to have a book translated and published as accurately as possible—may run counter to the goals of the Party.

The result is a strangely unenthusiastic form of censorship. In one section of “Country Driving,” I describe in de-

## A SHIP'S WHISTLE

Years passed and I received no letter with the word “trombone.”

The distant cousins wrote, offered their shriller sympathies.

“What's wrong with *us*?” Nothing I knew. Plugboard and isinglass,

grimoire and cwm, friends all. Still I felt horribly alone.

Until one day it dropped through roundel light onto the mat.

I was tearing my dictionaries of hope—who, why, and what—

apart when it sounded, that note pressing for home. Trombone.

And fearing it a dream was like waking in the wrong room,  
not daring to believe in your return, or having come

to my senses after sickness. Veneer, mirror, and comb:

objects that shivered as relief swelled under them, they drew  
lots to be turned to words which, soon as said, I knew

were brass. Years sliding past alone until—*avast!*—trombone.

—Will Eaves

tail the Party's manipulation of a village election, but none of this material was removed or changed. Probably the most negative thing that I have ever written about China is the final section of that book, which describes a small industrial city called Lishui. In the factory town, I observed bosses hiring underage workers, violating safety laws, damaging the environment, and encountering official corruption; in one scene, I describe witnessing government tax officials shake down two entrepreneurs for a bribe. All of that was left intact in the mainland version. Of the section's hundred and forty-five pages, only nine words were removed, a background reference to opposition to the Party. The rest of the book was cut in three places: two references to Falun Gong and a long scene in which a drunk Mongolian tour guide tells me that Genghis Khan, like Hitler and Osama bin Laden, was a great man, and that the Chinese have no right to claim him for their history.

The censorship of “River Town” seems even more capricious. The attack by the mob, a discussion of the flawed Three Gorges Dam, scenes that show the ignorance of college Party officials—none of that was altered or removed. The longest cut in the book consists of a conversation between me and one of my Chinese tutors, in which we men-

tion Li Peng, the former Premier, who was orphaned as a child. In the scene, I offend my tutor by mistakenly using the word “bastard” instead of “orphan.”

Zhang told me that he had wanted to leave the scene alone, but it was too risky for the name Li Peng to be connected to “bastard,” even if the point was to show a foreigner's clumsiness with Chinese. This is one trend of the censorship: criticism of local officials and Party activities is fine, but certain high-profile national figures are off limits. References to Falun Gong are almost always removed. The Tiananmen Square massacre is usually called “an incident” or “a revolt.” Material about Tibet or Xinjiang tends to get cut. Zhang explained that he hadn't censored the description of the Mongolian tour guide, but the head of the publishing company removed it as a precaution. “Country Driving” was the publisher's first foreign book about China, and it didn't want somebody in the government to read the words of the drunk Mongolian and think about Tibet.

Zhang said that he had been particularly anxious while preparing that first book—he compared it to walking a tightrope. But, after the book appeared, it established a baseline. “Thanks to the initial success, now I am more confident and skillful in dealing with the sensitive



material,” Zhang wrote to me. And the cuts grew fewer with each book. In “Country Driving,” the publisher removed a total of five pages of material out of four hundred; a year later, only two pages were taken out of “River Town.” The following year, the publisher cut just twenty sentences from “Strange Stones,” a collection of magazine articles.

On the train from Shanghai to Beijing, Zhang and I discussed the censorship, and at one point he said, “You know that I’ve never asked you to publish ‘Oracle Bones.’” That book includes reporting on Uighurs and Falun Gong, and it would be treated differently from the others, which focus mostly on the lives of average Chinese in the countryside and in small cities. All of my books are also published in uncensored translations in Taiwan; at signings on the mainland, it was common for readers to arrive with imported copies of “Oracle Bones.” Like many other supposedly banned books, the Taiwanese version of “Oracle Bones” is easy to buy in China—Taobao, among other major online retailers, sells it. But readers struggle with the way in which Taiwanese books are still printed, in traditional characters with vertical text. Nevertheless, I didn’t want to publish something in which the heart of my reporting was censored, and Zhang told me that he had no interest in doing that job.

But where should the line be drawn? Evan Osnos, my colleague at *The New Yorker*, wrote an Op-Ed in the *Times* last year about his decision not to sign a Chinese contract for his book “Age of Ambition.” He warned against writers justifying censorship by the percentage of a book that is left alone, explaining, “It is tempting to accept censorship as a matter of the margins—a pruning that leaves the core of the story intact—but altering the proportions of a portrait of China gives a false reflection of how China appears to the world.” Most articles in the Western press have been critical of the practice; the *Times* described foreign authors engaging “in an Orwellian embrace with a censorship apparatus.” But the same quality that makes Chinese censorship so obvious—the fact that there’s an extensive apparatus whose work is crude—might actually make it less insidious than foreigners imagine. Even George Orwell would probably agree with this. In the original preface

to “Animal Farm,” he warned against the complacency of assuming that censorship is the primary threat to freedom of information. “The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary,” he wrote. His book had been rejected by four publishers. “Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban.”

Any writer knows that a story or a book can be affected by many extra-literary factors: a reporter’s preconceptions, an editor’s expectations, an imbalance of research, a demand for marketing. The journalist’s responsibility is to evaluate all the factors that can negatively affect his work and decide which ones he can control or minimize. Censorship, despite the knee-jerk revulsion toward the word, in some cases poses less of a threat to the foreign writer than these other issues. For one thing, Chinese censorship is easy to document, as opposed to the more subtle pressures that can shape publications in the United States. For my Chinese books, I added an introductory page explaining that some material had been deleted and directing readers to my Web site. On the site, which has not been blocked by the Chinese firewall, I’ve listed everything that has been removed or changed.

With “Strange Stones,” I was preparing to post the censored material online when a Chinese reader e-mailed me asking for a list of the cuts. We corresponded for a while, and eventually he admitted that he’s a police officer who likes the new foreign books. He had avoided telling me his occupation, because, as a reader, he was familiar with negative experiences I’d had with the police in China. When I asked for his opinion of censorship, he described it as “an affront to an author.” But he also wrote, “The Chinese people have the Chinese people’s ability to adapt to this situation in clever ways.”

Such resourcefulness is hard for outsiders to grasp. And Western commentary about censorship often turns inward, portraying limitations in other countries in a way that celebrates our own values. One of the most striking qualities of foreign portrayals of censorship in China is

the apparent lack of interest in Chinese readers and editors. Two of the most prominent recent feature stories about the censorship of foreign books—long pieces in the *Times* and in the *South China Morning Post*—fail to include a single comment by a reader in China. Neither quotes a Chinese editor by name. The articles have not been censored, of course, but nevertheless each has a gaping hole at its center. As long as Chinese readers remain unknown, and editors appear shadowy and symbolic, it’s difficult to understand them or to feel much sympathy.

In the West, there’s a tendency to approach censorship with a high-handedness that would seem inappropriate if applied to other issues of development, like poverty. There may in fact be more similarities than we realize. The drive for improved access to information, which includes education, contact with new ideas, and freedom of expression, is at least as complex as everything that it takes to improve living standards. A term like “self-censorship,” which is a favorite in the West, puts the blame on individuals in ways that may not be right. There’s no economic equivalent—we don’t have a neat two-word phrase that describes the things that poor people supposedly do to perpetuate their own poverty.

A figure like Zhang Jiren, who was born into a system of much greater restriction than today’s, is more likely to perceive himself in positive terms. From his perspective, the key dynamic isn’t self-censorship but the efforts that he

makes to bring foreign books to Chinese readers. And he’s willing to take real risks to do this. The week before my tour, he got in trouble for publishing a book with a cover blurb by a scholar who is associated tangentially with the Tiananmen Square movement.

Zhang hadn’t expected the blurb to cause trouble, but such unpredictability is key to the system. Individual books are handled differently, and what works one year may not work the next. If somebody crosses an invisible line and angers officials at the General Administration of Press and Publications, he can be fired. In the case of the blurb, Shanghai Translation was forced to recall all six



thousand copies and replace their covers. This is a sad task at which Chinese publishers are skilled: sometimes they razor out a page or two that has offended some official. Zhang was punished with a reduction of his year-end bonus, and he had to write a self-criticism, but he shrugged it off. "The important thing is what you can do, not what you can't do," he said.

After the book tour, I made a trip back to Fuling. I flew to Chongqing, where I was picked up at the airport by Li Xueshun, my former colleague, and another teacher. We drove to Fuling on one of three new expressways that have been constructed since I left. There are also two new railways, including a high-speed line, and the college has relocated to a larger site, outside of town, as part of a national expansion of higher education that began in 1999. When I taught in Fuling, there were two thousand students; now there are more than twenty thousand.

The initial paranoia about my book had vanished after a year or two, and Li and I had begun corresponding regularly. Over time, we developed the friendship that hadn't been possible when we were colleagues, and he talked to me openly about the unauthorized translation. He didn't know what the government had done with the book, but he said that he had enjoyed the experience of translating a couple of chapters. At one point, he asked me to recommend him as a translator if I ever published on the mainland.

In 2010, when I contracted with Shanghai Translation, I mentioned Li Xueshun's name. I did this mostly as a courtesy, assuming that the publisher would want somebody with formal experience. But, to my surprise, Zhang Jiren gave Li a trial and then hired him to translate "Country Driving." After the book came out, I realized that there was something remarkable about Li's work. The first sign was when my mother-in-law, who was educated in Taiwan and has high standards for literary Chinese, told me that the mainland version is exceptional. Reviewers praised it highly, and soon Li was flooded with requests from publishers; he also translated my two other books. One editor at a Beijing publishing house wrote me, "Many of our generation (born after

1980) are not sensitive to the beauty of classic Chinese language. We grew up with politicized language education." He continued, "The translation of 'River Town' is one of the best in China, I have learned a lot from it and really appreciate Mr. Li Xueshun."

One day in Fuling, I visited Li in his office, and he took a key out of his pocket and unlocked a big cabinet. Inside were the original drafts of the government-ordered translation. I had never seen it before, and the chapters looked like artifacts from another era: handwritten on cheap, thin paper, with a letterhead so obsolete that it featured the college's four-digit telegraph code.

Li and I talked about the nineteen-nineties, and I mentioned how hard it had been to figure out the politics of being a foreigner. "We also didn't understand," he said. "The school didn't understand. Nobody knew how to interact with the foreigners." He said that recently he had been thinking about the past, because he had translated "The Children of Sanchez," the account of poverty in Mexico City, which was commissioned by Zhang Jiren. "Some things in that book reminded me of my childhood," Li said. "We were very poor, and we didn't have toys, and sometimes we didn't have enough to eat." He grew up on a farm in southeastern Sichuan Province, and he was the only person in his family to become educated.

Li is now in his mid-forties, and, like Zhang, he's a member of what could be described as the reform generation. They were children when Deng Xiaoping came to power, in 1978, so they grew up with the country's economic and educational changes. But many still remember poverty and isolation, and their parents and grandparents gave them some sense of the horrors of the Mao era. This generation reminds me a little of the one that came of age in America in the sixties and seventies, with elders who had experienced the Depression and the Second World War. I understood why Zhang published books like "The Children of Sanchez," which was influential in discussions of poverty and urbanization in the U.S. during the sixties and seventies.

My former students, most of whom teach at middle schools in small cities, are also of this generation. I'm still in touch with most of them, and periodi-

cally I send out a detailed questionnaire. Last fall, among the twenty-nine who responded, the median household income was around sixteen thousand dollars, which is much higher than the national average, and all but two owned both an apartment and a car. The transformation had been dramatic; most had grown up in rural poverty, and when they entered the workforce, in the late nineties, their salaries averaged only about five hundred dollars a year. But when I asked about social class more than seventy per cent still defined themselves as poor or lower class. One private-school teacher, who earns more than fifty thousand dollars a year and owns two apartments and a car, without any debt, said that he is lower class. In China, the concept of a middle class remains unfamiliar, and I sensed that my students were trying to figure out appropriate expectations in the new environment. And the country has changed so fast that few feel secure with their status.

They often remark on how different life is for their pupils. "I know their world and their thoughts very well," a teacher named Maggie Qin wrote on the questionnaire. "But they don't know our world. And they never can, because life for them is so easy." In China, where generation gaps are enormous, the reform cohort may be the only one that understands the thinking of both the preceding and the following generations. Its members are something of a bridge, and the idea of these people growing older, and progressing into positions of greater authority, makes me cautiously optimistic. In the long term, Zhang Jiren could be right—the current political campaign may be a surface storm that, once it passes, will have had little effect on deeper currents.

But these are questions for another day, another place. In Fuling, Li Xueshun had something else to show me. He returned to the locked cabinet, retrieved an old copy of "River Town," and opened to a description of the Wu River on page 149. "You wrote 'western bank,'" he said. "It should be 'eastern bank,' right?"

I read the paragraph, visualized the geography, and thanked him. I told Li that I'd ask the American publisher to correct the mistake, and he put the book back in the cabinet and turned the key. ♦



# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

BY PAUL RUDNICK

1. What is a cisgender person?
  - (a) Someone whose gender identity matches the sex that he or she was assigned at birth.
  - (b) Someone who most likely had never heard the word "cisgender" until he or she read this.
  - (c) Someone who will now start observing his or her spouse's or co-workers' behavior, rolling his or her eyes

- community. What is a gay woman who's too exhausted to wear either flannel or lipstick?
  - (a) A paralegal.
  - (b) Your last girlfriend, whose name you can't remember, but it sounded like either Janet or Janice.
  - (c) Ryan Seacrest.

4. The Republican congressman



and muttering, "Typical cisgender."

2. A "bear" is a sturdy, hairy gay man, while an "otter" is a slimmer version of a bear. What is a "muskrat"?
  - (a) An even smaller gay man whom bears and otters wear as a corsage.
  - (b) An otter who forgot to bathe.
  - (c) Someone only slightly less disturbing than a weasel.

3. "Butch" and "femme" are traditional terms used within the lesbian

Aaron Schock has been suspected of being a closeted homosexual because he appeared shirtless on the cover of *Men's Health*, wears pink gingham, and has an office decorated like "Downton Abbey." What else about Schock seems to indicate gayness?

- (a) The fact that he refers to having sex with men as "crossing the aisle."
- (b) His habit of voting for a bill by squealing, "I love that!"
- (c) His formal request for increased military funding to provide "tons more

of those totally cute little short shorts that Bradley Cooper wears in 'American Sniper.' Yumbo!"

5. In response to the release of "Fifty Shades of Grey," sex-toy retailers are stocking up on products aimed at the film's primary audience, middle-aged women. What are some of these products?

- (a) Plus-size handcuffs.
- (b) Erotic lubricants flavored like Doritos.
- (c) Whips that can also be used to swat mosquitoes away from a tray of heart-shaped cupcakes.

6. What did Kim Kardashian say when she heard the news that her stepfather, Bruce Jenner, planned to transition?

- (a) "He better not do anything to his butt."
- (b) "He should do a sex tape first, to introduce his new brand."
- (c) "I will be proud to invite her to my next wedding."

7. Mike Huckabee has stated that he can be friends with people "who have life styles that are not necessarily my life style." He has also compared gay marriage to legalizing polygamy or incest. What else has Huckabee said regarding human sexuality?

- (a) "My research proves that bisexuals are just Democrats who want to vote twice."
- (b) "There's nothing in the Bible that says a man can't marry a pie."
- (c) "If I wear frilly lace panties, does that entitle me to use the women's rest room? Because then I'm fine with it."

8. If you come out to your mother as an insatiable power bottom, how will she respond?

- (a) "Mazel tov!"
- (b) "Just like your father!"
- (c) "My plan worked!"

9. If an F.T.M. trans person, a gay male power bottom, and a cisgender asexual have an orgy, what happens?

- (a) HBO passes.
- (b) Everyone says that they really liked this week's book except for the ending.
- (c) Hillary wins. ♦

# FRAME OF REFERENCE

*To illuminate—or to irritate?*

BY JOHN MCPHEE



In 2000, Abe Crystal, an undergraduate from Columbia, South Carolina, was enrolled in a writing class I teach at Princeton, and one of his assignments was to compose a profile of another student, whose name was Grainger David. This Grainger happened to be the undergraduate president of F. Scott Fitzgerald's University Cottage Club and was as smoothly verbal and self-possessed as any of Fitzgerald's characters, including Amory Blaine, of "This Side of Paradise." In the profile, Abe Crystal mentioned, without amplification, that Grainger David had "sprezzatura."

Sprezzatura? Of course, in this advanced age of the handheld vocabulary, everyone on earth knows what sprezzatura

means, but in 2000 I had no idea, and I reached for an Italian dictionary. Nothing. I looked in another Italian dictionary. Nothing. I looked in Web II—Webster's unabridged New International Dictionary, Second Edition. *Niente*. I picked up the phone and called my daughter Martha, who has lived in Italy and co-translated John Paul II's "Crossing the Threshold of Hope" into English from the Vatican's Italian.

Her credentials notwithstanding, Martha was no help.

I tried my daughter Sarah, a professor of art and architectural history at Emory, whose specialty is Baroque Rome. Her answering machine was as helpful as Martha.

That evening, I happened to attend

a crowded reception at the New York Public Library with my daughter Jenny, the other translator of the Pope's book, and her husband, Luca Passaleva, who was born, raised, and educated in Florence. "Hey, Luc. What is the meaning of 'sprezzatura'?"

Luca: "I don't know. Ask Jenny."

Jenny: "I don't know, but that couple over there might know. He's in the Italian consulate."

Consul: "Ask my wife. She is literary, I am not."

Signora: "I'm very sorry. I have no idea."

Back in Princeton the next day, I had a scheduled story conference with Abe Crystal, his profile of Grainger David on the desk in front of us. With my index finger touching "sprezzatura," I said, "Abe, what the hell is this?"

Abe said he had picked up the word in Castiglione's "The Courtier," from 1528. "It means effortless grace, all easy, doing something cool without apparent effort."

Soon after he left, I called Sarah again, and she picked up. She said Abe had it right, but the word "nonchalance" should be added to his definition. She said that Raphael carried the ideal of sprezzatura into painting. "He painted his friend Baldassare Castiglione as the ideal courtier, the embodiment of sprezzatura. It's now in the Louvre."

Robert Bingham, my editor at *The New Yorker* for sixteen years, had a fluorescent, not to mention distinguished, mustache. In some piece or other, early on, I said of a person I was writing about that he had a "sincere" mustache. This brought Bingham, manuscript in hand, out of his office and down the hall to mine, as I had hoped it would. A sincere mustache, Mr. McPhee, a sincere mustache? What does that mean? Was I implying that it is possible to have an insincere mustache?

I said I could not imagine anything said more plainly.

The mustache made it into the magazine and caused me to feel self-established as *The New Yorker's* nonfiction mustache specialist. Across time, someone came along who had "a no-nonsense mustache," and a Great Lakes ship captain who had "a gyroscopic mustache,"



and a North Woodsman who had “a timber-cruiser’s guileless mustache.” A family practitioner in Maine had “an analgesic mustache,” another doctor “a soothing mustache,” and another a mustache that “seems medical, in that it spreads flat beyond the corners of his mouth and suggests no prognosis, positive or negative.”

Writing has to be fun at least once in a pale blue moon.

Dodge had a great deal more hair on his upper lip than elsewhere on his head. With his grand odobene mustache he had everything but the tusks. . . . His words filtered softly through the *Guinness Book* mustache. It was really a sight to see, like a barrel on his lip.

Inevitably, all this led to Andrew Lawson. Andrew Lawson? The great Scottish-born Andrew Lawson, structural geologist, University of California, Berkeley, who named—perhaps eponymously—the San Andreas Fault. Andrew Lawson was lowered in a bucket into a caisson in San Francisco Bay in order to decide if the south pier of the Golden Gate Bridge could be constructed where it is.

With his pure-white hair, his large frame, his tetragrammatonic mustache, Lawson personified Higher Authority.

Querying letters poured into *The New Yorker’s* office like water over the sides of a caisson. With utmost generosity, the writer Charles McGrath, then a young *New Yorker* editor, voluntarily answered them.

A tetragrammatonic anything and a term that seems to have stalled in the Italian Renaissance are points of reference that might just irritate, rather than illuminate, some readers. Make that most readers. The perpetrator is the writer. Mea culpa. Meanwhile, though, in a contrary way, we have come upon a topic of first importance in the making of a piece of writing: its frame of reference, the things and people you choose to allude to in order to advance its comprehensibility. Mention Beyoncé and everyone knows who she is. Mention Veronica Lake and you might as well be in the Quetico-Superior. Obviously, if you mention New York, you can count on most readers to know what that is and where. Mention Vernal Corners and you can’t. It’s upstate. What

would you do with Scarsdale? Do you need to say where it is? Step van, Stanley Steamer, black-and-white unit, goose-neck trailer. If you know what a goose-neck trailer is, raise your hand.

One hand rises among thirty-two. “Where are you from, Stacey?” “Idaho.”

To sense the composite nature of frames of reference, think of their incidental aftermath, think of some old ones as they have moved through time, eventually forming distinct strata in history. At the University of Cambridge, academic supervisors in English literature would hand you a photocopy of an unidentified swatch of prose or poetry and ask you to say in what decade of what century it was written. This custom is called dating and is not as difficult as you might imagine. A useful comparison is to the science of geochronology, which I once tried to explain with this description:

Imagine an E. L. Doctorow novel in which Alfred Tennyson, William Tweed, Abner Doubleday, Jim Bridger, and Martha Jane Canary sit down to a dinner cooked by Rutherford B. Hayes. Geologists would call that a fossil assemblage. And, without further assistance from Doctorow, a geologist could quickly decide—as could anyone else—that the dinner must have occurred in the middle eighteen-seventies, because Canary was eighteen when the decade began, Tweed became extinct in 1878, and the biographies of the others do not argue with these limits.

Fossils were the isotopes of their time, and that is how, in the nineteenth century, the science developed the story it was telling. All this is only to show how frames of reference operate, how quickly they evolve from currency to obsolescence. The last thing I would ever suggest to young writers is that they consciously try to write for the ages. Oh, yik, disgusting. Nobody should ever be trying that. We should just be hoping that our pieces aren’t obsolete before the editor sees them. If you look for allusions and images that have some durability, your choices will stabilize your piece of writing. Don’t assume that everyone on earth has seen every movie you have seen. In the archives of ersatz references, that one is among the fattest folders. “This recalled the climb-out scene in ‘Deliverance.’” “That was like the ending of ‘Birdman of Alcatraz.’”

Here is a lively group pieced together

by Sarah Boxer, writing in 2010 in *The New York Review of Books* about the artists Hedda Sterne and Saul Steinberg, who “knew all the *New Yorker* people, the writers and cartoonists and movie people—Charlie Addams, Cobean, William Steig, Peter Arno, Ian Frazier, Dwight Macdonald, Harold Rosenberg, E. B. White, Katharine White—and they all came to dinner.” That’s a fossil assemblage with a virus in it. Ian Frazier, in Hudson, Ohio, in the era of those dinners, was nine years old and younger.

Frames of reference are like the constellation of lights, some of them blinking, on an airliner descending toward an airport at night. You see the lights. They imply a structure you can’t see. Inside that frame of reference—those descending lights—is a big airplane with its flaps down expecting a runway.

You will never land smoothly on borrowed vividness. If you say someone looks like Tom Cruise—and you let it go at that—you are asking Tom Cruise to do your writing for you. Your description will fail when your reader doesn’t know who Tom Cruise is.

Who is Tom Ripley?

Dwight Garner, in the *Times*, 2010: “Castelli was a hard man to know. He had thousands of friends but few intimates. There was something elusive, shape-shifting, almost Tom Ripley-like about him.”

More scattered examples from not very bygone years:

John Leonard, *Times Book Review*, 2005, reviewing the Library of America’s collection of James Agee: “Who knows what marriage was, maybe musical electric chairs. Add it all up, tossing in macho rubbish about tomcatting and romantic beeswax about the agony of artistic creation, and what you don’t get is a grown-up. You get Rufus in Knoxville.”

Janet Maslin, the *Times*, 2008, reviewing “The Memoirs of a Beautiful Boy,” by Robert Leleux: “Despite many obstacles, not least of them the danger of sounding like a would-be Augusten Burroughs, he has made her the centerpiece of a frantically giddy coming-of-age story.”

Maureen Dowd, the *Times*, 2008, on President emeritus William Jefferson Clinton: “Bill continues to howl at the

moon. . . . He's starting to make King Lear look like Ryan Seacrest."

Joel Achenbach, in his wonderful book "Captured by Aliens" (1999), page 391: "There's a nebula in space that looks like Abe Vigoda."

Joel, as a college senior, was in my writing class in 1982. I keep trying. Also in "Captured by Aliens," he produces this description of a professor at Tufts University: "He looks a bit like Gene Wilder, and has some of the same manic energy." Gene Wilder? Search me. But nota bene: when Joel says "the same manic energy," he is paying back much of the vividness he borrowed.

Enter Robert Wright, who was in the class four years earlier and has become an author who will take on subjects few would dare to confront, such as "The Evolution of God" in five hundred and seventy-six pages (2009). His first book (1988) was called "Three Scientists and Their Gods." Chapter 19 begins this way: "The fact that Kenneth Boulding is a Quaker does not mean that he looks like the Quaker on the cartons of Quaker Oats."

Bob does not seem interested in the future of that allusion, but he does go on to say:

As it turns out, there is a certain resemblance. Both men have shoulder-length, snow-white hair, blue eyes, and ruddy cheeks, and both have fundamentally sunny dispositions, smiling much or all of the time, respectively. There are differences, to be sure. Boulding's hair is not as cottony as the Oats Quaker's, and it falls less down and more back, skirting the tops of his ears along the way. And Boulding's face is not soft and generic. His nose is jutting, and his eyes are deeply set and profoundly knowing.

Borrowed vividness may never have been so amply repaid.

Trevor Corson, in "The Zen of Fish," 2007: "Salmon smell their way back to their birthplace. . . . As they head upriver they also undergo astonishing anatomical changes, not unlike Dr. David Banner's transforming into the Incredible Hulk."

Mark Singer, in "Somewhere in America," 2004, paying off with so much interest that he has no debt: "Keys lacks the aura and demeanor of a politician. He's sixty years old, pink-faced and freckled, with red hair that's completing the transition to white. His drooping mustache, wire-rimmed glasses, plaid shirts, and blue jeans give him the

overall look of a lean Wilford Brimley."

Who Wilford Brimley? Who cares?

Ian Frazier, in *The New Yorker*, in 2014, attempting unsuccessfully to stay out of debtor's prison: "Along with playing conga drums, she throws pots and is pursuing her second M.A., in experimental psychology with a focus on marine biology. She looks enough like the late Bea Arthur, the star of the nineteen-seventies sitcom 'Maude,' that it would be negligent not to say so."

**F**rames of reference are grossly abused by writers and broadcasters of the punch-line school. We're approaching the third decade of the twenty-first century and someone on Fox refers coyly to "a band called the Beatles and another called the Rolling Stones." Y2kute. And NPR is reviewing the life of the *Washington Post's* Ben Bradlee: "He became close to a Georgetown neighbor—a young senator named John F. Kennedy." Doesn't that give you a shiver in the bones? Pure pallesthesia. Ta-da!

The columnist Frank Bruni, writing in the *Times* in 2014, said, "If you . . . want to feel much, much older, teach a college course. I'm doing that now . . . and hardly a class goes by when I don't make an allusion that prompts my students to stare at me as if I just dropped in from the Paleozoic era. . . . I once brought up Vanessa Redgrave. Blank stares. Greta Garbo. Ditto. We were a



few minutes into a discussion of an essay that repeatedly invoked Proust's madeleine when I realized that almost none of the students understood what the madeleine signified or, for that matter, who this Proust fellow was."

As it happened, Frank Bruni was at Princeton teaching in the same program I teach in—same classroom, same semester, different course, different day—and if I had felt "much, much older" I would have been back in the

Archean Eon. Frank wrote that he was wondering if all of us are losing what he felicitously called our "collective vocabulary." He asked, "Are common points of reference dwindling? Has the personal niche supplanted the public square?"

My answer would be that the collective vocabulary and common points of reference are not only dwindling now but have been for centuries. The dwindling may have become speedier, but it is an old and continuous condition. I am forever testing my students to see what works and does not work in pieces of varying vintage.

"Y2K—what does that mean?"

No one knew before the late nineties, and how long will the term last, if it isn't gone already?

Y2K, QE2, P-38, B-36, Enola Gay, NFL, NBA, CBS, NBC, Fox? Do you watch comets?

A couple of weeks before that spring semester began, I had been in Massachusetts collecting impressions for this project by testing the frame of reference in a piece of mine called "Elicitation," which was soon to run in *The New Yorker*. Why Massachusetts? Because that's where Brookline High School is and where Mary Burchenal's senior English classes meet, and where Isobel McPhee, daughter of my daughter Laura, was one of her students. The "Elicitation" frame of reference consisted of about five dozen items running along the edges of seven thousand words.

"I would like to try that list on you. Raise your hand if you recognize these names and places: Woody Allen."

Nineteen hands went up. Everybody present in the class that day was aware of Woody Allen. As we went through my list, nineteen hands went up also for Muhammad Ali, *Time* magazine, Hallmark cards, Denver, Mexico, Princeton University, Winston Churchill, "Hamlet," and Toronto. So those perfect scores reached around about fifteen per cent of the frame.

Sarah Palin, Omaha, Barbra Streisand, Rolls-Royce—eighteen.

Paul Newman—seventeen.

Heathrow—sixteen.

Fort Knox—fifteen.

Elizabeth Taylor, "My Fair Lady"—eleven.

Cassius Clay—eight.



Waterloo Bridge, Maggie Smith—six.

Norman Rockwell, Truman Capote, Joan Baez—five.

Rupert Murdoch—three.

Hampstead, Mickey Rooney—two.

Richard Burton, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh—one.

“In England, would you know what a bobby is?”—one.

Calabria, St. John’s Wood, Peckham Rye, Churchill Downs, the Old Vic, *News of the World*, Jackie Gleason, David Brower, Ralph Nelson, David Susskind, Jack Dempsey, Stephen Harper, Thomas P. F. Hoving, George Plimpton, J. Anthony Lukas, Bob Woodward, Norman Maclean, Henry Luce, Sophia Loren, Mort Sahl, Jean Kerr, James Boswell, Samuel Johnson—zero.

In 1970, I went to Wimbledon on an assignment from *Playboy*. The idea was to spend the whole of the championships fortnight there and then write a montage of impressions, not only of the players but also of the place. The eventual piece was quite long, but its freestanding parts were short, like this one:

Hoad on Court 5, weathered and leonine, has come from Spain, where he lives on his tennis ranch in the plains of Andalusia. Technically, he is an old hero trying a comeback but, win or lose, with this crowd it is enough of a comeback that Hoad is here. There is tempestuous majesty in him, and people have congregated seven deep around his court just to feel the atmosphere there and to see him again. Hoad serves explosively, and the ball hits the fence behind his opponent without first intersecting the ground. His precision is off. The dead always rise slowly.

And so on to the end of Hoad, which was imminent. Meanwhile:

Smith, in a remote part of the grounds, is slowly extinguishing Jaime Fillol. . . . Laver is so far ahead that the match has long since become an exhibition.

The grounds were often more interesting than the matches, the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club being such an index fossil from the nineteenth century.

In the Players’ Tea Room, the players sit on pale-blue wicker chairs at pale-blue wicker tables eating strawberries in Devonshire cream.

The editor of the piece was the affable



*“Another desert island cartoon clipping from my uncle.”*

Arthur Kretchmer, who was soon to become *Playboy*’s editorial director, a position he held for thirty years. My conferences with him, always on the telephone, were light and without speed bumps as we made our way through the strawberries, the extinguishings, and the resurrections, until we came to the Members’ Enclosure.

In the Members’ Enclosure, on the Members’ Lawn, members and their guests are sitting under white parasols, consuming best-end-of-lamb salad and strawberries in Devonshire cream. Around them are pools of goldfish. The goldfish are rented from Harrods. The members are rented from the uppermost upper middle class. Wimbledon is the annual convention of this stratum of English society, starboard out, starboard home.

Arthur Kretchmer said, “What does that mean?”

Assuming a tone of faintest surprise, I explained that when English people went out to India during the

Raj, they went in unairconditioned ships. The most expensive staterooms were on the port side, away from the debilitating sun. When they sailed westward home, the most expensive staterooms were on the starboard side, for the same reason. And that is the actual or apocryphal but nonetheless commonplace etymology of the word “posh.” Those people in the All England Members’ Enclosure were one below Ascot: starboard out, starboard home.

I didn’t have a stopwatch with which to time the length of the silence on the other end of the line. I do remember what Kretchmer eventually said. He said, “Maybe one reader in ten thousand would get that.”

I said, “Look: you have bought thirteen thousand words about Wimbledon with no other complaint. I beg you to keep it as it is for that one reader.”

He said, “Sold!” ♦





A REPORTER AT LARGE

## BREAK-IN AT Y-12

*How a handful of pacifists and nuns exposed the vulnerability of America's nuclear-weapons sites.*

BY ERIC SCHLOSSER

The Y-12 National Security Complex sits in a narrow valley, surrounded by wooded hills, in the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Y-12 and Oak Ridge were built secretly, within about two years, as part of the Manhattan Project, and their existence wasn't publicly acknowledged until the end of the Second World War. By then, the secret city had a population of seventy-five thousand. Few of its residents had been allowed to know what was being done at the military site, which included one of the largest buildings in the world. Y-12 processed the uranium used in Little Boy, the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Seven

decades later, Y-12 is the only industrial complex in the United States devoted to the fabrication and storage of weapons-grade uranium. Every nuclear warhead and bomb in the American arsenal contains uranium from Y-12.

Strict security measures have been adopted at the site to prevent the theft of its special nuclear materials. Y-12 has some five hundred security officers authorized to use lethal force within its Protected Area, five BearCat armored vehicles, Gatling guns that can fire up to fifty rounds per second and shoot down aircraft, video cameras, motion detectors, four perimeter fences, and rows of dragon's teeth—low, pyramid-shaped

blocks of concrete that can rip the axles off approaching vehicles and bring them to a dead stop. The management of Y-12 calls the place “the Fort Knox of Uranium.”

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility was built, at a cost of more than half a billion dollars, to safeguard Y-12's uranium. Situated at the north end of the Protected Area, the storage facility is an imposing white structure, longer than a football field, with guard towers at all four corners. If the tops of the towers were crenellated, the building would look like an immense, windowless White Castle. Some

LEFT TO RIGHT: GETTY (DOROTHY DAY); BETTMAN/CORBIS (PHILIP BERRIGAN AND PROTEST MARCH)





*The Plowshares movement was inspired by Dorothy Day, a Greenwich Village bohemian who converted to Catholicism and urged resistance to all wars. In the Vietnam era, Philip Berrigan led actions to symbolically destroy the nuclear arsenal.*

nine hundred thousand pounds of weapons-grade uranium are stored inside it. Little Boy—a crude and highly inefficient atomic bomb, designed in the early nineteen-forties with slide rules—contained a hundred and forty-one pounds of weapons-grade uranium, and almost ninety-nine per cent of it harmlessly blew apart as the bomb detonated. Just a couple of pounds underwent nuclear fission—the splitting of atoms—above Hiroshima. And, when that happened, two-thirds of the buildings in the city were destroyed and perhaps eighty thousand civilians were killed. The amount of weapons-grade uranium needed to build a terrorist bomb with a similar explosive force could fit inside a small gym bag.

At about half past two in the morning on July 28, 2012, three people were dropped off at the Scarboro Church of Christ, a modest brick building with a single white spire in an African-

American neighborhood of Oak Ridge. They walked through the church parking lot to a nearby dirt path, followed the path through a stand of trees, reached a meadow, and turned left. Up ahead, in the darkness, they could see the silhouette of a steep hill called Pine Ridge. On the other side of the hill was Y-12. All three had spent time in federal prison. They belonged to a loosely organized group whose members have been prosecuted by the Justice Department for violent crimes, sabotage, and threatening the national security. The three hoped to reach the uranium-storage facility before sunrise, having carefully planned the intrusion for more than a year. But they had no desire to steal anything or to make a bomb. They wanted to “heal” and “transform” the building with their own blood; to mark it as a symbol of evil, empire, and war; to protest against its role in maintaining America’s nuclear arsenal. Gregory

Boertje-Obed was a Christian pacifist in his late fifties who painted houses for a living and worked with the homeless in Duluth, Minnesota. Michael Walli was a Catholic layman in his early sixties, inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi to live humbly and serve the poor. Megan Rice was an eighty-two-year-old nun, a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Carrying flashlights and backpacks, they headed toward the hill.

Not so long ago, the threat of nuclear terrorism seemed imminent. In the fall of 2001, during an interview with a Pakistani journalist, Osama bin Laden claimed to possess nuclear weapons, and President George W. Bush’s Administration invoked the prospect of mushroom clouds rising above American cities to justify its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “We judge that there is a high probability that Al Qaeda will attempt an attack using a CBRN”—chemical,



biological, radiological, or nuclear—"weapon within the next two years," John Negroponte, Bush's Ambassador to the United Nations, informed the Security Council in April, 2003. "There is little doubt that Al Qaeda intends to and can detonate a weapon of mass destruction on U.S. soil," members of a bipartisan commission on national security wrote the following year.

More than a decade later, a nuclear-weapons catastrophe has not yet occurred. The threat has been dismissed as "alarmist" by some academics and no longer inspires much public concern. But since the early nineteen-eighties a small group of peace activists, devout supporters of the Plowshares movement, have been trying to break into nuclear-weapons sites throughout the United States. They've almost always succeeded. Plowshares actions have not only revealed serious vulnerabilities in the security of America's nuclear enterprise; they've also shed light on the inherent risks faced by every nation that possesses weapons of mass destruction. Having these weapons creates endless opportunities for theft or misuse. At the moment, the probability of terrorists staging a successful nuclear attack may be low, but the consequences would be unimaginably high. And, as Plowshares

activists have demonstrated again and again, improbable things happen all the time.

The origins of the Plowshares movement can be traced to the work of Dorothy Day. At the age of eighteen, Day dropped out of college in Illinois and moved to New York City. She was an aspiring writer, a free spirit drawn to the radical politics and bohemia of Greenwich Village in 1916. She soon had a job as a reporter with *The Call*, a socialist newspaper, covering protest marches, strikes, and the birth-control movement. Her family was conservative and Episcopalian, but Day rejected all the trappings of middle-class respectability. She lived in a communal apartment, took lovers, spent time with anarchists and Communists, with John Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, and John Reed.

By the time Day was twenty-four, she'd been arrested outside the White House while demanding the vote for women and sent to jail for a month; worked as an assistant managing editor at *The Masses*, a left-wing monthly that was shut down after opposing the draft and the First World War; got arrested during the raid of an International Workers of the World flophouse and mistakenly been charged with prostitution; worked

as a library clerk, a restaurant cashier, an artist's model, a nurse; had an illegal abortion; got married and sought a divorce; moved to Europe and lived on the island of Capri for six months; interviewed Leon Trotsky; and decided to write a novel. After selling the film rights to her first book, she bought a beach house on Staten Island and had a daughter with a common-law husband. And then Dorothy Day did something so radical that few of her radical friends could comprehend it. She became a Catholic. She took a vow of poverty. And she devoted the rest of her life to the practice of a new kind of American Catholicism—one that was uncompromising in its service to the homeless, its opposition to state power, its resistance to all forms of violence and war.

Dorothy Day sought to emulate Jesus and live the Gospel, embracing a Christianity true to its historical roots. She regarded the Sermon on the Mount as her manifesto: Blessed are the meek and the peacemakers. Like Jesus, she'd decided to live with "the rejected ones, the scorned ones," convinced, she told the author Robert Coles, that "the more luxurious our lives, the further we are from Him." In 1933, she founded the *Catholic Worker*, a monthly newspaper that sold for a penny. It published the sort of advocacy journalism that Day had written for years, now imbued with a Biblical perspective. No longer content simply to advocate on behalf of the dispossessed, Day opened a "house of hospitality" on Charles Street, in the West Village. It fed and housed the poor, as well as Day and fellow Catholic Workers. About thirty hospitality houses soon opened nationwide, along with rural communes that embodied the growing movement's ideal of decentralized power and self-sufficiency. Day had become an anarchist—but preferred the term libertarian, not wanting to offend. She opposed most of the New Deal, believed in changing the world through "direct action," and never voted in an election.

When the United States entered the Second World War, Dorothy Day urged young men to oppose the war and avoid the draft. Day had little use for traditional Catholic teachings about the morality of armed conflict. She thought there was no such thing as a "just war."



"Is the hamburger innovative?"

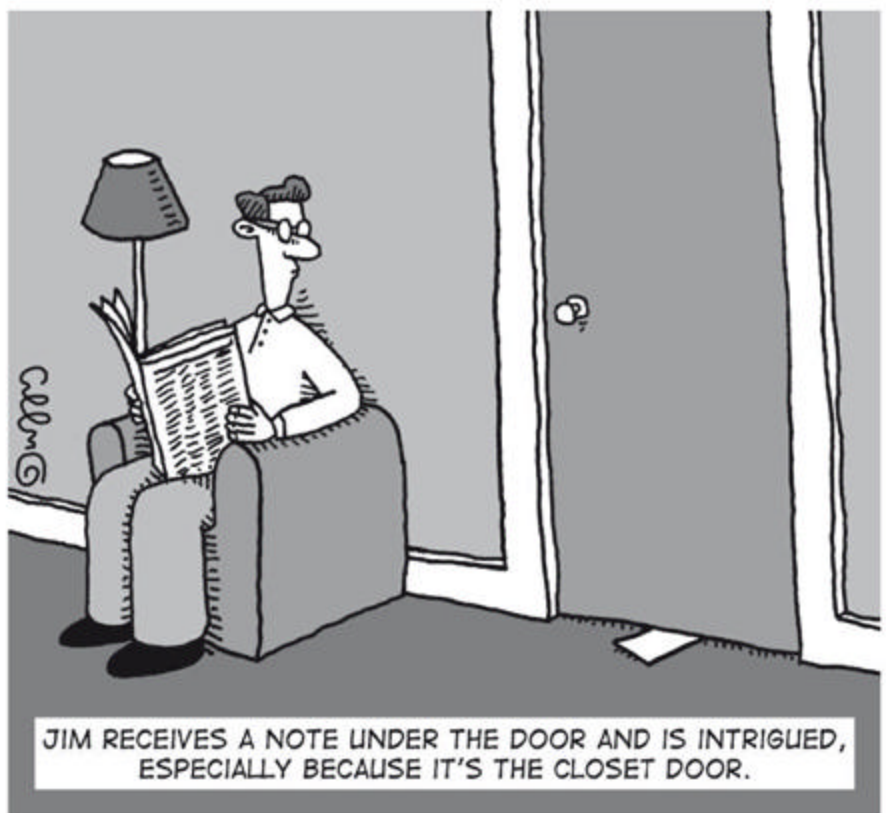


A true Christian should be willing to shed one's own blood before taking the life of another human being. Her pacifism alienated many close friends and supporters. At a time when Nazi Germany was massacring civilians, turning the other cheek seemed dangerous, immoral, and ludicrous. But Day would not budge. The *Catholic Worker* lost three-quarters of its circulation during the war, and more than half of the hospitality houses closed.

By the late nineteen-forties, America's growing anxiety about nuclear weapons revived interest in Day's pacifism. She had condemned the use of atomic bombs against Japan, calling it a "colossal slaughter of the innocents." The possibility of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union gave new urgency to a movement seeking to make war obsolete. Day admired Mahatma Gandhi and adopted his tactics of nonviolent resistance. In 1955, she refused to enter a fallout shelter during a civil-defense exercise in New York City, faced prosecution for breaking the law, pleaded guilty, and called the protest "an act of penance" for the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Her punishment was a suspended sentence. Over the next four years, Day was jailed three times for refusing to participate in the city's annual air-raid drills. "BAN THE BOMB . . . God is our father, and all men are our brothers," one of her handouts said. "We are willing to die for this belief."

Members of the Catholic Worker movement were among the first Americans to protest the Vietnam War. On November 6, 1965, Day gave a speech at a rally in Union Square, urging young men to burn their draft cards and refuse to serve in Vietnam. The speech could barely be heard, as hecklers shouted at Day and called her "Moscow Mary." The escalation of the war in Vietnam made Day's form of nonviolent resistance seem increasingly quaint and irrelevant. Many of her young followers now thought that a stronger dose of direct action was necessary.

In the fall of 1967, Philip Berrigan, a priest who frequently wrote for the *Catholic Worker*, went to the Baltimore Custom House with three other protesters, walked into the draft board, pulled open file cabinets, and poured



bottles of their blood over draft records. While awaiting the legal resolution of that case, he and his older brother, the poet Daniel Berrigan, who was also a Catholic priest, turned the level of nonviolent resistance up a few notches. On May 17, 1968, the Berrigans and seven other activists entered a Selective Service office in Catonsville, Maryland. After a brief scuffle with two women clerks, the group grabbed hundreds of draft files from cabinets, carried them into a parking lot, and set them on fire with homemade napalm. Newspaper reporters and a television crew had been notified of the protest in advance. "We destroy these draft records not only because they exploit our young men," a handout given to reporters said, "but because they represent misplaced power concentrated in the ruling class of America." The recipe for napalm—a mixture of gasoline and soap flakes—had been found in a Green Beret handbook.

The actions of the Catonsville Nine elevated the Berrigan brothers to the pantheon of counterculture heroes, and

their trial became an international media circus. Thousands of demonstrators marched through Baltimore to support the defendants, and hundreds of antiwar activists waited in line every morning for a seat in court. Philip Berrigan opposed the American-backed government of South Vietnam, and had even considered travelling there to fight alongside the Vietcong. Judge Roszel C. Thomsen allowed the Berrigans to discuss their motives on the witness stand, to tell the jury why the war in Vietnam was immoral, to explain why the foreign policy of the United States was illegal, not the burning of draft records. "We say: killing is disorder; life and gentleness and community and unselfishness is the only order we recognize," Daniel Berrigan said. He later adapted the court transcripts into a play, composed in free verse, that was widely performed.

Dorothy Day supported the Berrigans but felt uneasy about their form of direct action. It was one thing to burn your own draft card, quite another to burn someone else's. In 1970, after being found guilty in the Catonsville

Nine trial, the Berrigans strayed farther from her notions of nonviolent resistance by going on the run instead of reporting to prison. As a fugitive, Daniel arrived at Cornell University on a motorcycle, gave a speech before thousands of students, and left campus with his head hidden inside the head of a Bread and Puppet Theatre puppet. Philip went into hiding with help from Elizabeth McAlister, a nun whom he later married. The Berrigan brothers were soon captured and imprisoned. But their war with the government had not ended. While behind bars, Philip Berrigan was indicted, along with McAlister, for conspiring to blow up the steam tunnels beneath federal buildings in Washington, D.C.—and for plotting to kidnap Henry Kissinger, who was President Nixon’s national-security adviser at the time. The case against Berrigan and McAlister ended in a mistrial.

When Philip Berrigan was released, in December, 1972, the national mood had changed. As the war in Vietnam wound down, so did the movement to oppose it. Once featured on the cover of *Time*, Berrigan found that his latest acts of resistance, such as depositing broken and bloody dolls on the White House lawn, attracted little media interest. Now excommunicated by the Church, Berrigan and McAlister helped to organize half a dozen “resistance communities” on the East Coast. Berrigan thought that “some of us would have to accept God’s Word as a handbook and try to embody it.” Only one of the communes—Jonah House, in inner-city Baltimore—lasted beyond the seventies. And it got off to a rough start. Determined to live outside the capitalist system, members of Jonah House often obtained food by dumpster diving and theft. Berrigan was arrested at a grocery store for shoplifting, McAlister at a Sears, Roebuck for trying to steal tools. Chastened and embarrassed by the arrests, Berrigan worked as a housepainter. He and McAlister eventually had three kids, dressing them in hand-me-downs, sending them to inner-city schools,

bringing them to peace demonstrations. Berrigan also made the threat posed by nuclear weapons the focus of Jonah House’s activities.

The first Plowshares action occurred on September 9, 1980, when the Berrigan brothers, Father Carl Kabat, Sister Anne Montgomery, and four others walked into a nuclear-warhead plant operated by General Electric in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. The activists had brought hammers, and when they found two missile nose cones designed to house nuclear warheads they set out to fulfill the Biblical injunction in Isaiah 2:4:



“And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” When security officers arrived, the intruders stopped hammering the nose cones and didn’t resist arrest. Philip Berrigan emptied a vial of his blood on some nearby blueprints.

The Plowshares Eight tried to use their trial to publicize the threat of nuclear weapons. But the crowds failed to materialize, and even the local religious community offered little help. Some of the defendants, housed at a Catholic women’s college during the first week of the trial, were forced to leave by outraged alumnae. All eight were found guilty and sentenced to prison. Although the first Plowshares had been a disappointment, a new template for direct action had been created—one that inspired more than a hundred similar break-ins.

Like American military operations, subsequent Plowshares actions were given names: Good News Plowshares, Prince of Peace Plowshares, Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares, Kairos Plowshares Two. During Trident Nein, in July, 1982, two nuns and five accomplices broke into the General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard, in Groton, Connecticut. Four of them paddled by canoe to a Trident submarine, climbed on the sub, hammered its missile hatches, poured blood on it, and rechristened it the U.S.S. Auschwitz with spray paint.

Philip Berrigan encouraged Plowshares supporters to use their own blood as part of the ritual, often carried in baby bottles, “to symbolize the death of innocent human beings.”

At about four in the morning on Thanksgiving Day in 1983, Liz McAlister took part in her first Plowshares. She and six other protesters sneaked into Griffiss Air Force Base, in Rome, New York. It was remarkably easy: they didn’t have to cut the barbed-wire fence; they just pulled the strands apart and climbed through. Someone who had spent time at the base—where the Strategic Air Command kept B-52 bombers on alert with nuclear weapons—told McAlister where to go. The activists opened the unlocked door of a hangar and said, “Hello, anybody home?” Nobody replied, so they walked in. They poured blood on the floor and on a B-52, pasted photographs of children onto the plane, hammered its bomb-bay doors, walked outside with an anti-nuclear banner, and awaited arrest. But nobody came to arrest them. After about half an hour, one of them picked up a phone in the hangar, called the base switchboard, and wished the operator a “Happy Thanksgiving.” Still nobody came. They wandered around outside for about an hour, singing songs and holding the banner, until security forces finally arrived.

McAlister spent more than two years in prison for her role in the Griffiss Plowshares. It was a difficult period for her children; the youngest was still a toddler. Berrigan supported his wife wholeheartedly. Both were willing to risk their lives for their faith, and he later argued that the break-in was motivated by love “for all of the world’s children.” Imprisoned six hours by car from Jonah House, McAlister wrote letters to her children every day.

Other Plowshares followers received even harsher punishments for acts of nonviolent resistance. On November 12, 1984, Father Carl Kabat broke into an unmanned, unguarded Minuteman II intercontinental-ballistic-missile complex forty miles east of Kansas City. He was accompanied by his older brother, Father Paul Kabat; Helen Woodson, a mother of eleven children; and Larry Cloud-Morgan, a Native American activist and spiritual leader of the Ojibwa



tribe. As part of an action called Silo Pruning Hooks, they cut the lock off the perimeter fence with a bolt cutter, drove a yellow van trailing an air compressor onto the Minuteman site, and removed their tools. Carl Kabat attached a jackhammer to the air compressor and started chipping away pieces of the concrete silo door, while the others attacked equipment at the site with sledgehammers and wire cutters. The air compressor and the jackhammer died after half an hour. When two Air Force security officers appeared, half an hour after that, they found the protesters kneeling on the silo door, singing, praying, and sharing bread. A banner draped over the fence said, "WHY DO YOU DO THIS EVIL THING?" The four activists were convicted in federal court. Larry Cloud-Morgan was sentenced to eight years in prison; Father Paul Kabat, to ten. Father Carl and Helen Woodson were given eighteen-year prison sentences.

Carl Kabat was released from prison after serving about seven years. He celebrated by breaking into the same Minuteman complex the following year, as part of an action called Good Friday Plowshares Missile Silo Witness. He was sentenced to six months in a halfway house—and broke into a Minuteman complex outside Grand Forks, North Dakota, two years later, on April Fool's Day, wearing makeup, a wig, and a clown outfit. He was sentenced to prison for an additional five years. After gaining his freedom, having spent more than fifteen years in prison since his conviction as part of the original Plowshares Eight, Father Kabat broke into Minuteman complexes three more times, dressed as a clown. "We are fools for Christ's sake," he explained, quoting St. Paul.

The American anti-nuclear movement reached its peak during the early nineteen-eighties, with large demonstrations nationwide and a rally in Central Park that attracted almost a million people. But Plowshares activists played a marginal role in the new movement, which relied on mainstream tactics, like circulating petitions and seeking new legislation, not direct action. The "nuclear freeze" movement sought a halt to the arms race—not the abolition of nuclear weapons, the dismantling of a permanent war economy, world peace.

Without much fanfare, Philip Berrigan kept getting arrested and going to prison. He still worked as a house-painter to pay bills. The Jesus whom he worshipped was "an outlaw," "a non-violent revolutionary" who drove the money changers from the temple, challenged authority, and lived amid the poor. There was nothing meek or moderate about Him. Despite the end of the Cold War, the Plowshares actions continued, regardless of whether anyone noticed.

Jonah House now sits on the grounds of St. Peter's Cemetery in Baltimore. The first burial at St. Peter's occurred in 1851, but the cemetery was abandoned in the late nineteen-sixties. It soon disappeared from view, as trees, bushes, vines, and poison ivy grew over the graves. The Baltimore Archdiocese allowed members of Jonah House to live there for free starting in the late nineties. In return, they agreed to look after the cemetery. Most of its twenty-two acres have been cleared since then, at enormous effort, with some help from donkeys and goats. When I visited, last spring, the place felt bucolic—a well-tended stretch of green, surrounded by a tire-recycling plant, a National Guard depot, and a low-income housing project. The two little buildings occupied

by Jonah House seemed peaceful and humble. Church services are held there every Sunday, the poor and the homeless are fed there every Tuesday, and the rest of the week is devoted to anti-war efforts, amid a landscape containing the remains of about fifteen thousand bodies.

At a table in the tidy kitchen of a house originally built for the cemetery caretaker, I had lunch with Liz McAlister, Sister Ardeth Platte, and Sister Carol Gilbert. Some of the food had been grown in their organic garden. All three women had short hair, and wore the kind of clothes usually seen on Plowshares activists: sneakers, bluejeans, and T-shirts bearing a political slogan. Sister Ardeth's said, "NO WAR." We talked about the history of the Plowshares movement, their involvement in direct action, the many places where they'd been jailed. Sister Carol, who's sixty-seven, and Sister Ardeth, who's seventy-eight, were both outraged and amused that their work on behalf of world peace had once landed them on a terrorist watch list. Their commitment to nonviolence was complete. Although deeply upset by the attacks on Christian communities in Syria and Iraq, they thought that any violent response—even in self-defense, even to halt the slaughter of women and children—would be



*"I'm not going to fall for that routine where you try and stall until the neighborhood gentrifies."*

wrong. They would rather die than have to kill. Like the other Plowshares activists I've encountered, there was nothing dour or severe about the two nuns and the former nun. They had an exuberant, often wry sense of humor. When asked how many times she'd been arrested, Liz McAlister, now seventy-five, replied, "Not enough."

Although the inclusion of Sister Ardeth and Sister Carol on a terrorist watch list was ridiculed in the press and later rescinded, the organizational skills of the Plowshares movement would be the envy of groups hoping to commit spectacular acts of terror on American soil. Plowshares actions aren't improvised or spontaneous; they're planned as much as a year in advance. The first step, according to one veteran, involves "wearing away of the ego, disarming the self, forming community, doing an in-depth analysis of our times." The volunteers pray together, read the Bible together, learn to trust one another without hesitation. They must be willing to risk their lives and sacrifice their freedom together. No one else can be harmed or endangered by the action—a fundamental rule. And everyone who plays a supporting role in it, often recruited from the more than a hundred and fifty Catholic Worker houses across the country, must be protected from arrest and conspiracy charges.

Once a strong bond has been forged among the group, a target is selected and then "scoped" for months. While scoping it, Plowshares members observe the security at a site and also may test it, repeatedly. In preparation for one action,

they secretly broke into an Air Force base three times before publicly "disarming" it with blood. Preparation for the ensuing trial is considered equally important. How the activists behave in court can establish the action's broader meaning, draw public attention to the cause, and put the government's behavior on trial. The final step of a Plowshares action—prison—may be the most difficult and yet, in some ways, the most rewarding.

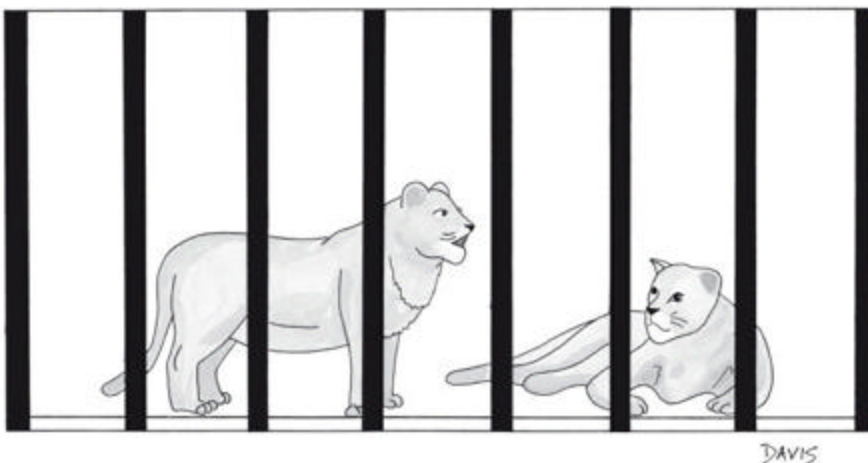
Sister Ardeth and Sister Carol have been arrested together more times than they can count, but they never seek to be incarcerated. They don't enjoy being in prison. An action that ends without time behind bars is called a "freebie." Instead of punishment or deterrence, however, they view prison as an opportunity. Tending the sick, the poor, and those in prison is the path to salvation, Jesus preached. Although prisons and jails are "horrible places," Sister Carol told me, "it's the closest as white, middle-class North Americans that we can really be with the poor." She and Sister Ardeth have been shackled and chained, strip-searched in front of male guards, locked in filthy cells with clogged toilets and vermin. They've listened helplessly to a dying friend, another nun, cry for assistance from a nearby cell. The sisters look after the other inmates, trying to teach and empower them. But there have been lighter moments as well. Sister Carol got to know Martha Stewart behind bars. And Sister Ardeth practiced yoga with Piper Kerman, a convicted drug offender, who later wrote about her in "Orange Is the New Black."

Sister Ingalls, a character inspired by Sister Ardeth, appears in the television show based on the book.

Born and raised in central Michigan, Sister Ardeth had decided by the age of eleven that her life would be devoted to God and serving others. She entered a convent after her freshman year of college, got a bachelor's degree and a master's, became a teacher, then a high-school principal in a poor, largely African-American and Latino neighborhood of Saginaw, Michigan. Dorothy Day was her role model. As a teacher and a principal in Saginaw, Sister Ardeth found herself in the middle of fistfights, gunfights, and race riots. She was elected to the city council, served on it for twelve years, helped found the city's first rape crisis center and a shelter for battered women. She became mayor pro tem of Saginaw and enjoyed being a public servant, but her political career ended after Pope John Paul II decreed that members of the clergy could no longer run for elected office. Sister Ardeth helped to gain passage of a 1982 state law expressing Michigan's support for a nuclear freeze. The following year, nuclear weapons were deployed at Wurtsmith Air Force Base, in Michigan. She decided to oppose that move and joined forces with Sister Carol, whom she'd taught in high school. They were both Dominicans, members of a Catholic order whose motto is "Veritas." "We preach truth to power," Sister Ardeth likes to say.

Before long, the former principal of a Catholic high school and one of her former pupils were dancing atop a nuclear-weapons bunker at Wurtsmith Air Force Base, singing, "Jesus Christ has risen today!" They later prayed at the gates of the base every day for three years. The fact that millions of people could be killed by nuclear weapons, at any moment, demanded that something radical be done. They broke into a Minuteman complex in eastern Colorado and, during Gods of Metal Plowshares, hurled blood onto the bomb-bay doors of a B-52 at Andrews Air Force Base, in Maryland. Sister Ardeth and Sister Carol chose the protest's name to convey the idolatry of nuclear weapons—the blind faith that they somehow keep us safe.

After lunch, we walked along the dirt



*"Well, I checked again, and we're definitely the ones inside the cage."*



paths of St. Peter's. On the land that remains uncleared, toppled gravestones and cracked, ornate marble tombs could be glimpsed amid the bushes and trees. Some of the stones were so old and weathered that the names of the dead could no longer be seen. I asked the sisters if the lack of publicity about Plowshares actions, the lack of awareness about the nuclear threat, ever made their work seem unsuccessful, their years in prison futile. Sister Carol acknowledged that the public apathy about nuclear weapons was frustrating. But she offered a different measure of success: Are you truly living your faith?

I questioned the morality of breaking into high-security nuclear sites: What if someone got shot? What about the trauma a young security guard might experience after realizing that he or she had killed a nun rather than a terrorist? Sister Ardeth replied that nobody had been harmed in the more than thirty years since the first Plowshares, and that the Lord should be thanked for that. She betrayed no doubts. "I will continue doing direct action for the rest of my life," Sister Ardeth told me. "If I can walk, you'll find me out there."

The cleared section of St. Peter's had a bright, cheery feel that day, more like a sculpture garden than like a graveyard. A handful of people have been buried there since the cemetery reopened, including Philip Berrigan. He died at the age of seventy-nine, in 2002, having spent much of the previous year in prison for a Plowshares action. The inscription on Berrigan's gravestone expressed his view of Christ's central message: "Love one another."

Before I left Jonah House, Sister Ardeth handed me a brown paper bag. I looked inside and saw an apple, a power bar, and some nuts.

"It's a snack for your train ride to New York," she said.

A few weeks later, I drove through the missile fields of eastern Colorado and western Nebraska. Sister Ardeth and Sister Carol had urged me to see firsthand how lax the security still is at Minuteman launch complexes. The United States has four hundred and fifty Minuteman III missiles at sites in Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota. The Air

Force's early intercontinental ballistic missiles—its Atlases, Titans, and Titan IIs—were overseen by launch crews that lived in underground control centers near the silos. When the Minuteman was being designed, in the late nineteen-fifties, the Air Force decided that the missiles should be remotely operated. The change would reduce the manpower necessary to operate them, enabling a single launch crew to command as many as fifty missiles. One of the new silos could be twelve miles away from its crew. The Air Force also chose to disperse Minuteman missiles throughout the Great Plains, so that a surprise attack by the Soviet Union couldn't easily destroy them all. In Montana, the new launch sites were built in an area extending for some fourteen thousand square miles. Instead of being protected by armed guards, as in the Soviet Union, America's ballistic-missile complexes were unmanned, and built on one-acre plots of land, amid ranches and farms. Decisions made for reasons of efficiency and military strategy in the twentieth century couldn't anticipate the implications for nuclear terrorism in the twenty-first. Today, these missile sites are essentially unguarded nuclear-weapons storage facilities. Some are within a quarter mile of private homes.

Using a map created by anti-nuclear activists in the late nineteen-eighties, I had little trouble finding Minuteman complexes. They are often visible from public roads. Soon I could spot one without the map: a cluster of poles in the middle of a field, surrounded by chain-link fence. What seemed extraordinary at first—a ballistic-missile complex right off the highway, in the middle of the prairie, just an hour or so east of Greeley, Colorado—soon became routine. At one Minuteman site, I parked my rental car, got out, and walked over to the nearby fence. The padlock on the gate could be cut open in seconds. Beyond it, the site's perimeter fence didn't look the slightest bit intimidating, despite a sign that said, "WARNING . . . Use of Deadly Force Authorized," in bright-red letters. Within a few minutes, you could remove a section of that fence big enough to drive a van, a backhoe, or a tractor-trailer onto the complex. After 9/11, Remote Visual Assessment Cam-

eras were installed at Minuteman sites. While exploring the outskirts of the launch site, taking pictures, I kept expecting that someone would see me with the surveillance cameras and order me to stop. No one did.

It would be extremely difficult to break into a Minuteman launch facility and get anywhere near the missile—but not impossible. The complexes were designed to withstand the nearby detonation of a Soviet nuclear warhead. The silo door is a thick slab made from a hundred and ten tons of reinforced steel and concrete. A nearby Personnel Access Hatch leads to an underground entryway blocked by a seven-ton steel plug. You need one code to open the hatch, another to lower the plug out of the way. But the right explosives, properly employed, could eliminate the need for codes. A former member of a Minuteman security force told me that he could break into a complex, especially with help from an insider—a rogue launch officer, security officer, or maintenance technician. Once inside the silo, you would have to possess highly specialized skills and great ingenuity to launch a Minuteman missile or detonate its warhead. The missile would be easy to destroy, however, leaving behind a radioactive mess.

During the summer of 2013, a tactical-response force operating out of Malmstrom Air Force Base, in Montana, failed a major security test. According to a classified Air Force report obtained by the Associated Press, the tactical force didn't respond "effectively" to the simulated takeover of a Minuteman complex. The troops apparently couldn't recapture the silo from terrorists and didn't take "all lawful actions necessary to immediately regain control of nuclear weapons." The report criticized the training and the leadership of the security force. Its commanding officer was removed from duty, and the entire strategic-missile wing at Malmstrom flunked its safety-and-security inspection. The Air Force now plans to deploy almost three hundred additional airmen for nuclear-security tasks, responding to complaints that the current force is overworked, undermanned, and suffering from poor morale.

Even a well-trained and brilliantly led Air Force tactical-response force





*The assault on the Y-12 uranium site: Michael Walli, Sister Megan Rice (who was eighty-two), and Gregory Boertje-Obed.*

might find it hard to cope with a terrorist attack on a Minuteman site, owing to logistical problems and antiquated equipment. One of the missile complexes in Nebraska is about a hundred and twenty-five miles from the airbase in Wyoming where a full tactical-response force is stationed. With luck, it would take an hour or so for the force to reach that complex in an emergency. It could take a lot longer. And, ideally, it wouldn't be raining heavily or the middle of the night. The UH-1N Huey helicopters that would carry the security force are, on average, forty-five years old. They are not properly equipped for nighttime or bad-weather operations. They lack offensive weapons, defensive measures, modern avionics. They sometimes cannot fly the entire length of a missile field without being refueled. Their crews rely on paper maps to navigate. And the Hueys are too small to carry a pilot, a co-pilot, a flight engineer, and a full tactical-response team.

Almost a decade ago, an Air Force study concluded that the Hueys were responsible for "missile field security vulnerabilities." The same helicopters are also used to fly overhead and guard nuclear warheads being moved to and from missile sites. "I cannot get security forces to the right places at the right time without a fast, capable, all-weather airlift capability," the commander in charge of all the Minuteman complexes said, seven years ago. During the summer of 2014, the Air Force announced a plan to obtain used Blackhawk helicopters from the Army for Minuteman security forces. But that plan remains unfunded, and the Vietnam-era Hueys may continue in service until 2020, if not longer.

For nearly forty minutes, I stood on the shoulder of a dirt road within throwing distance of a Minuteman complex. I didn't see another car on the road, let alone a security force with guns drawn. The short-grass prairie that stretched before me was windswept, gorgeous,

and dotted with small homes. You would never think that hidden beneath this rural American idyll, out of sight, out of mind, were scores of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Just yards away from my rental car, sitting not far below my feet, there was a thermonuclear warhead twenty times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, all set and ready to go.

The climb up Pine Ridge was steep, and Gregory Boertje-Obed led the others through the dark woods without a map or a trail, guided only by flashlight.

Michael Walli worried about Sister Megan Rice. She was remarkably fit for an eighty-two-year-old, and she'd spent weeks training for this hike. But she had a mild heart condition. The two men had to stop every now and then so that she could catch her breath. When they resumed, Walli stayed behind her, keeping an eye on her, listening to her huff and



puff. He was fierier than most Plowshares activists, a believer in miracles and prophecy, a bold “warrior for peace,” like Philip Berrigan. Walli grew up on a farm in northern Michigan, the youngest of eight boys in his family. He also had six sisters. After dropping out of high school, in 1967, at the age of eighteen, Walli enlisted in the Army. Until then, his travels outside Michigan hadn’t extended farther than Wisconsin. Soon he was in Vietnam.

Two tours of duty left Walli alienated and disillusioned. He’d flown over jungles defoliated by Agent Orange, listened to B-52s carpet bombing at night, and witnessed firefights. After his return to the United States, he was in and out of veterans’ hospitals for a while, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and a spiritual crisis. He took a series of jobs, working at a Christmas-card factory in Chicago, serving as a deckhand on merchant ships that plied the Great Lakes. In 1979, he began to help at a Chicago soup kitchen run by a Franciscan priest. It was a transformative experience. Walli joined the Third Order of St. Francis, choosing to live in poverty and serve the poor. Eventually, he found his way to the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House in Washington, D.C., convinced that God had led him there. He stayed at various Catholic Worker houses along the East Coast and in the Midwest, gardening, doing manual labor, accumulating civil-disobedience arrests. He was strong and fit, with an intense look and a goatee. He helped clear the brush and cut down trees at St. Peter’s Cemetery.

Walli’s first Plowshares action occurred in 2006, when he and Boertje-Obed broke into a Minuteman complex in North Dakota. They were dressed as clowns to honor Father Carl Kabat, who also wore a clown outfit, and joined them. They found the Personnel Access Hatch unlocked, opened it, hammered on an inner lock, and spray-painted messages on the silo door, such as “God is not the author of confusion.” Walli got an eight-month sentence; Boertje-Obed, twelve months; and Father Kabat, fifteen.

A quarter of the way up Pine Ridge, Boertje-Obed saw a fence. It was chain link and not daunting, despite a “No Trespassing” sign. The fence marked the

boundary of the Y-12 complex. A winding dirt road ran beside it, patrolled by security forces. With a pair of red-handled bolt cutters, Boertje-Obed cut a vertical section of the fence along the fencepost, pushed open a gap, and helped the two others climb through it. Once they were all on Y-12 property, he neatly reattached the chain link to the fencepost with twine. That way, a security patrol driving past might not notice, in the darkness, that Y-12’s security had been compromised.

Although Sister Megan had been arrested between forty and fifty times, this was her first Plowshares action. And it was her idea. It had occurred to her a year and a half earlier, while she was sitting in a Tacoma courtroom, watching the trial of five activists who had broken into Kitsap Naval Base, the home port for more than half of America’s Trident ballistic-missile submarines. During perhaps the worst nuclear-security lapse in the history of the U.S. Navy, Father William (Bix) Bichsel, Father Stephen Kelly, Sister Anne Montgomery, and two others had managed to sneak into the Strategic Weapons Facility Pacific—a storage area containing hundreds of nuclear warheads for Trident missiles. Those warheads don’t have locking mechanisms. If a terrorist group detonated one at Kitsap, it not only would destroy the base and the Trident submarines but could also deposit lethal radioactive fallout on Seattle, about thirty miles to the east. If the group set off conventional explosives close to the warheads, a toxic cloud of plutonium might blanket the city. The Plowshares activists easily cut through Kitsap’s perimeter fence, hiked around the huge base for four hours, ignored all the warning signs, cut through two more fences, and got to within about forty feet of the bunkers where the nuclear warheads are stored. Father Bix was eighty-one at the time. Sister Anne was eighty-three. Having survived two open-heart surgeries, Father Bix brought along his nitroglycerine tablets and paused to take some during the long hike. About twenty marines with automatic weapons stopped the activists, put hoods on them to prevent them from seeing any more of the top-secret facility, and made them lie on the ground for three and a half hours, while the base was searched

for other intruders. When someone later said to Bichsel, Please, Father, don’t get into any more trouble, he laughed and replied, “We’re all in trouble.”

Listening to the testimony in court, Sister Megan thought she not only could do that; she had to do it. Her activism had been limited mainly to protests at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, in Georgia, and at the Nevada Test Site, where the country tested nuclear weapons. She’d spent time in prison for civil disobedience. Born in 1930 and raised for the most part in Manhattan, a block away from Barnard College, Megan Rice had been taught from an early age to oppose racism, to care for the weak and the dispossessed. Her father was a professor of obstetrics at N.Y.U., and he routinely treated indigent women at Bellevue Hospital. Her mother taught history at Hunter College. Rice’s parents were friends with Dorothy Day before the launch of the *Catholic Worker*. They supported her work throughout the Great Depression and discussed social problems at her hospitality house every Friday night.

At the age of eighteen, Rice joined the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. She wanted to teach at a girls’ school in Africa. She earned a bachelor’s degree at Fordham and a master’s in biology at Boston College, then moved to Nigeria in 1962. Sister Megan helped to build the school where she later taught, slept in a classroom while it was under construction, and lived in a rural village without electricity or running water. She remained in Africa for most of the next thirty years. One of Sister Megan’s uncles had spent time in Nagasaki, not long after its destruction by an atomic bomb, and his stories of the aftermath greatly disturbed her. When she moved back to the United States in the late eighties, to help look after her mother, she got involved in protests at the Nevada Test Site—and persuaded her eighty-four-year-old mother to get arrested there, too. Sister Megan’s time in Africa and the Nevada desert led her Catholic faith in a mystical, transcendental direction. She developed a profound love of nature, a belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

When Sister Megan raised the idea of a Plowshares action with Gregory Boertje-Obed, he agreed to join



*"Snap out of it, Ray—it's just sex."*

• •

her. Boertje-Obed had already done five of them. His wife, Michele Naar-Obed, had done three, and they'd even done one together. They always tried to insure that their daughter, Rachel, had at least one parent at home, not in prison. Sister Megan had lived at Jonah House for a while, helping to take care of Rachel. Michael Walli heard Boertje-Obed and Sister Megan were going to do a Plowshares action and asked to join them. The three spent time together at spiritual retreats, prayed together, read the Bible together, enlisted more than half a dozen others for logistical support, and discussed potential targets. They considered a direct action at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, where nuclear weapons are designed, and at the Kansas City Plant, where weapon components are manufactured. But they chose the Y-12 complex to honor a late friend, Sister Jackie Hudson, who had been arrested at the site the previous year—and to oppose plans to construct a vast uranium-processing plant there. Although the building would be used for the disassembly of old weapons, its size suggested that new ones would also be produced there. The big, white, newly completed Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility seemed like a fine target for direct action. Sister Megan chose

the name: Transform Now Plowshares. She hoped it would begin the process of shutting down Y-12 and transforming the American empire from a source of bloodshed into one of world peace.

Boertje-Obed did most of the planning. Using Google Earth and other satellite imagery, he looked for the best route to the uranium-storage facility. Two large white storage tanks on the northern edge of Y-12 promised to be a useful navigational aid. In addition to relying on the Internet, Boertje-Obed travelled to Oak Ridge and scoped the complex, taking notes on the security forces and their routines. He'd already broken into a missile complex and a naval air station, sneaked onto a submarine, and used a crowd of tourists as a diversion to get onto a battleship. The security at Y-12 was far more extensive than anything he'd ever confronted. Boertje-Obed wasn't sure if they could even get near the Protected Area.

More than hour after leaving the church parking lot, the three activists reached the top of Pine Ridge. Y-12 lay below them, lit with floodlights, bright as day. They could see the fences and the barbed wire, the concrete barriers and the guard towers. Boertje-Obed had originally planned for them to zigzag down the thickly wooded hill. But Sis-

ter Megan seemed tired, and the fastest, most direct route now made more sense—straight down the hill. The uranium-storage facility was about a quarter of a mile away. They paused briefly and headed toward it.

In the broad spectrum of nuclear-terrorist acts, the takeover of a Minuteman III complex or the theft of a nuclear warhead from a Trident base isn't the most likely to occur. The detonation of a radiological dispersal device, a "dirty bomb," is one of the easiest to pull off. All you need are some conventional explosives and a small amount of radioactive material. About half a dozen radioisotopes routinely used for medical, scientific, and commercial purposes—including a radioactive element found in household smoke detectors—could be utilized to make a dirty bomb. But the easiest forms of terrorism are also the least consequential. The conventional explosives in a dirty bomb would pose the greatest immediate risk to anyone near the detonation. Even in a densely populated city, the radioactive dust produced by a dirty bomb would cause serious, long-term harm to perhaps a few hundred people. Cleaning up after such a bomb, however, could cost billions of dollars. It would provoke a great deal of anxiety. And real estate in the contaminated area would lose much of its value.

Terrorists seeking to cause a radiological disaster, like the one at Fukushima or Chernobyl, would find it much harder to accomplish than making a dirty bomb. They might have to hack the control systems at a nuclear power plant, use explosives to rupture the plant's containment vessel, or drain the water from a pool storing its spent fuel rods. Without the water, the fuel rods could spontaneously ignite, releasing as much as five times the amount of harmful radioactivity contained in the reactor's core.

The detonation of a nuclear weapon would be the most difficult type of nuclear terrorism to achieve. It would also be the most lethal and dramatic. A nuclear explosion with one-fifteenth the force of the Hiroshima bomb, set off at a certain time, at a certain urban location in the United States, could kill about



two hundred thousand people. But stealing a weapon from a military base would be a real challenge. Even if you somehow obtained the weapon, you'd have to figure out how to detonate it. You'd need help from someone who knew a thing or two about nuclear weapons. Creating an "improvised nuclear device," a homemade atomic bomb, presents its own set of challenges. Only a couple of fissile materials can readily be used to produce the extraordinary destructive force of a nuclear weapon. Those materials are not widely found in nature. Plutonium-239 is produced in a nuclear reactor, and a thousand pounds of natural uranium contains just seven pounds of uranium-235, the isotope used in nuclear weapons. Although the physicists at Los Alamos gained acclaim for designing the first atomic bombs, the chemists and engineers at the Hanford Site, in Washington, and at Oak Ridge—who figured out how to produce fissile material—made those weapons possible. Seventy years later, hundreds of millions of dollars and great technical ability are still necessary to make plutonium-239 or to enrich uranium until it's weapons-grade (about ninety per cent uranium-235). Instead of dealing with all that hassle and expense, terrorists would be far more likely to steal fissile materials or buy them on the black market.

Plutonium is more efficient than uranium at creating a nuclear explosion. But plutonium is far more toxic, dangerous to handle, difficult to fabricate. And nuclear-weapon designs that use plutonium tend to be more complex. The design of Little Boy, the uranium weapon used to destroy Hiroshima, was so simple that the bomb didn't need to be fully tested before it was dropped. Acquiring the weapons-grade uranium was the hard part; detonating it was relatively easy. Luis Alvarez, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who played a crucial role in the Manhattan Project, later warned that if terrorists obtained weapons-grade uranium they wouldn't need to be experts in nuclear-weapon design. In fact, Alvarez wrote, they'd have "a good chance of setting off a high-yield explosion simply by dropping one half of the material onto the other half." Terrorists hoping to survive the nuclear blast would have to design and build a com-

plicated machine—a weapon that could be safely transported, armed near the target, and remotely detonated from miles away. Those willing to be vaporized and die for the cause would have fewer technical worries.

The threat of nuclear terrorism has been a concern since the early days of the atomic era. During a closed Senate hearing in 1946, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientific director of the Manhattan Project, was asked whether three or four people could smuggle into New York City the parts necessary to build a nuclear weapon. "Of course it could be done," he said, and it would be almost impossible to prevent. "The only instrument that would enable an inspector to find out if a packing crate contained an atomic bomb is a screwdriver." For most of the Cold War, however, nuclear threats from outside the United States seemed more pressing than those which might emerge within it. According to Matthew Bunn, a nuclear-security expert and a professor at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, during the nineteen-fifties and sixties "the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) literally imposed *no rules at all* concerning how private companies with weapons-usable nuclear material had to secure such stocks." The A.E.C. assumed that the financial value of the fissile material would encourage companies to safeguard it carefully. That wasn't the case. For decades, plutonium was shipped across the United States without armed guards. In 1972, the terrorist attack on the Munich Olympics prompted much tougher federal oversight of fissile materials. The subsequent rise of international terrorism and the 9/11 attacks tightened the security even further. And yet, until the opening of the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility, in 2010, tons of weapons-grade uranium were still being stored at Y-12 in a wooden building constructed during the Manhattan Project.

The traditional reliance on "guns, gates, and guards" for nuclear security may overlook a serious vulnerability at nuclear sites: the insider threat. Scott D.

Sagan, a nuclear-weapons expert and a professor of political science at Stanford University, thinks that the security culture at a facility is as important as its security equipment. Those who work at a nuclear site are the most familiar with its security weaknesses. Managers too often become complacent about longtime employees and don't consider the possibility that someone may be blackmailed or coerced into helping terrorists. As one security expert notes, "Any vulnerability assessment which finds no vulnerabilities or only a few is worthless and wrong."

The designs of the first atomic bombs were stolen by insiders at Los Alamos and shared with the Soviet Union. Insiders at Oak Ridge provided the Soviets with the details of how to make weapons-grade uranium. More recently, Edward Snowden, a private contractor working for the National Security Agency, gained access to some of its most highly classified secrets. The N.S.A. is responsible not only for generating the launch codes for America's nuclear weapons but also for designing the equipment that decrypts the codes. In 2013, two high-level nuclear commanders were removed from duty for behavior that could have exposed them to blackmail: illegal gambling, in one case; excessive alcohol consumption with young Russian women, in the other. A group of hackers known as Team Digi7al and Team Hav0k managed to hack Web sites belonging to the U.S. Navy, the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the United States National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Library of Congress. One of the group's members turned out to be Nicholas Knight, a sailor deployed on the U.S.S. Harry S Truman. Knight was a systems administrator for the computers running the aircraft carrier's nuclear reactor.

During the nineteen-sixties, when the Atomic Energy Commission trusted that private companies would effectively secure their own fissile material, hundreds of pounds of weapons-grade uranium went missing from the Nuclear Materials and Equipment



Corporation plant in Apollo, Pennsylvania. There is strong evidence that the uranium was shipped to Israel, with help from insiders at the plant. According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, President Gerald Ford discussed the theft with James Connor, an aide who'd been an official at the A.E.C. "The good news is that Israel definitely has the Bomb and can take care of itself," Connor told the President. "The bad news is that the stuff came from Pennsylvania."

The Y-12 complex had layered security. The closer you got to the Protected Area, the more intense the security became. The barriers, fences, cameras, and motion detectors weren't designed to prevent an intrusion. They were supposed to delay it, reveal it, and draw the necessary security forces to stop it.

The woods ended at the bottom of the hill. Once the three Plowshares activists emerged from the shadow of the last trees, they'd have to walk into a flat, clear, brightly lit area, cross Bear Creek Road, and cut through three more fences to reach the Protected Area. The uranium-storage facility loomed ahead, the great white castle, with guards bearing automatic weapons in its towers.

The three hid in tall grass as patrol cars passed. And then Boertje-Obed led the others across the road, over a low concrete barrier, to a chain-link fence, roughly eight feet high. It was the first line of the high-tech Perimeter Intrusion Detection and Assessment System. As Boertje-Obed began to cut the fence, he expected sirens and alarms to go off. But none did, and while he continued to cut the fence Walli draped a banner on it. The banner had a drawing of a nuclear weapon and the words "Never again."

The next fence looked more formidable. A thick cable was interlaced with chain link. Beyond the fence was a gravel area, a clear zone, and then another fence.

Boertje-Obed had a moment of doubt. He wondered if this fence was electrified. Maybe they should turn around, he thought. We're not going to be able to cut through this one without being detected.

None of them had spoken since leav-

ing the woods. Walli and Sister Megan had been silently following Boertje-Obed, assuming that he knew what to do and where to go.

"Well, it's worth a try," Boertje-Obed told himself.

The bolt cutters snipped the fence, and no klaxons sounded.

Sister Megan had felt all along that they were being guided by the Holy Spirit.

As Boertje-Obed cut through the last fence, he was feeling focussed and amazed. It was as bright as daylight, and yet nobody had spotted them. The uranium-storage facility was about four hundred feet away, across a stretch of asphalt.

The walls of the building were soon being decorated with spray paint and blood. It was Tom Lewis's blood, drawn from his arm four years earlier, not long before he died. Lewis had been one of the Catonsville Nine, an artist and a Plowshares activist arrested numerous times. From his deathbed, Lewis had asked that his blood be used in one last direct action. The blood was frozen, saved, thawed, and poured into six baby bottles carried in backpacks to Y-12. Now it dripped down the white walls.

"WORK FOR PEACE NOT WAR" was spray-painted onto the building in large black letters, along with "PLOWSHARES PLEASE ISAIAH" and "THE FRUIT OF JUSTICE IS PEACE." In red letters, "WOE TO THE EMPIRE OF BLOOD" was scrawled across another wall.

Boertje-Obed removed a small sledgehammer from Walli's backpack, hit a corner of the building, and knocked off a piece of concrete about a foot long. The others hammered the building lightly, and Sister Megan draped crime-scene tape across it. They placed Bibles and white roses on the ground to commemorate the White Rose, a German student group that had opposed Hitler and promoted nonviolent resistance. As they waited, they sang religious songs for half an hour. A patrol car appeared, at about four-thirty in the morning, as they were singing "This little light of mine, let it shine all around Y-12."

A security officer, Kirk Garland, had been asked to check the fences near the north side of the uranium-storage building, where an alarm had been triggered. When he got there, three

people approached his S.U.V., and Garland saw the slogans sprayed on the walls. He'd worked at federal nuclear facilities for almost thirty years and immediately assumed these people were protesters, not members of Al Qaeda. As he sat in the parked S.U.V., his supervisor called, and Garland asked for backup. The three stood beside his car door, said they'd been sent by God, offered him some bread, and read a statement.

"Today, through our nonviolent action, we, Transform Now Plowshares, indict the U.S. government nuclear modernization program," it began.

Garland told them not to make any sudden movements or remove anything from their backpacks. But the situation became chaotic. After the statement was done, someone started reading passages from the Bible to him. The elderly woman told Garland she had a heart condition. The two men ignored his instructions and reached into their bags. They pulled out candles, lit them, and offered him one.

Sergeant Chad Riggs was sitting in his office when a supervisor called and said that something was going on at the uranium-storage facility. Garland needed backup. As Riggs drove his Chevy Tahoe around the corner of the building, he saw Garland's vehicle, three people standing near it, and spray paint and blood on the walls.

Riggs jumped out of the Tahoe, drew his sidearm, ordered the three suspects to lie on the ground, and demanded to see their hands. At the same time, he got on the radio and called for additional officers. Once the suspects were on the ground, he told them to crawl away from the backpacks and gear. There appear to be intruders in the Protected Area, he said over the radio.

Concerned that a sniper might be hiding in the hills, Sergeant Riggs asked Garland to provide cover. Riggs put on body armor and retrieved his M4 assault rifle from the Tahoe. Then he ordered Garland to put on body armor, too.

Riggs thought that one of the men, the older one, the one with the goatee, might be dangerous. He ordered Garland to handcuff him.

When backup units arrived, the other man and the elderly woman were cuffed.



For the next five hours, the suspects had to sit on the ground, hands secured behind their backs. At about ten in the morning, they were provided with plastic chairs.

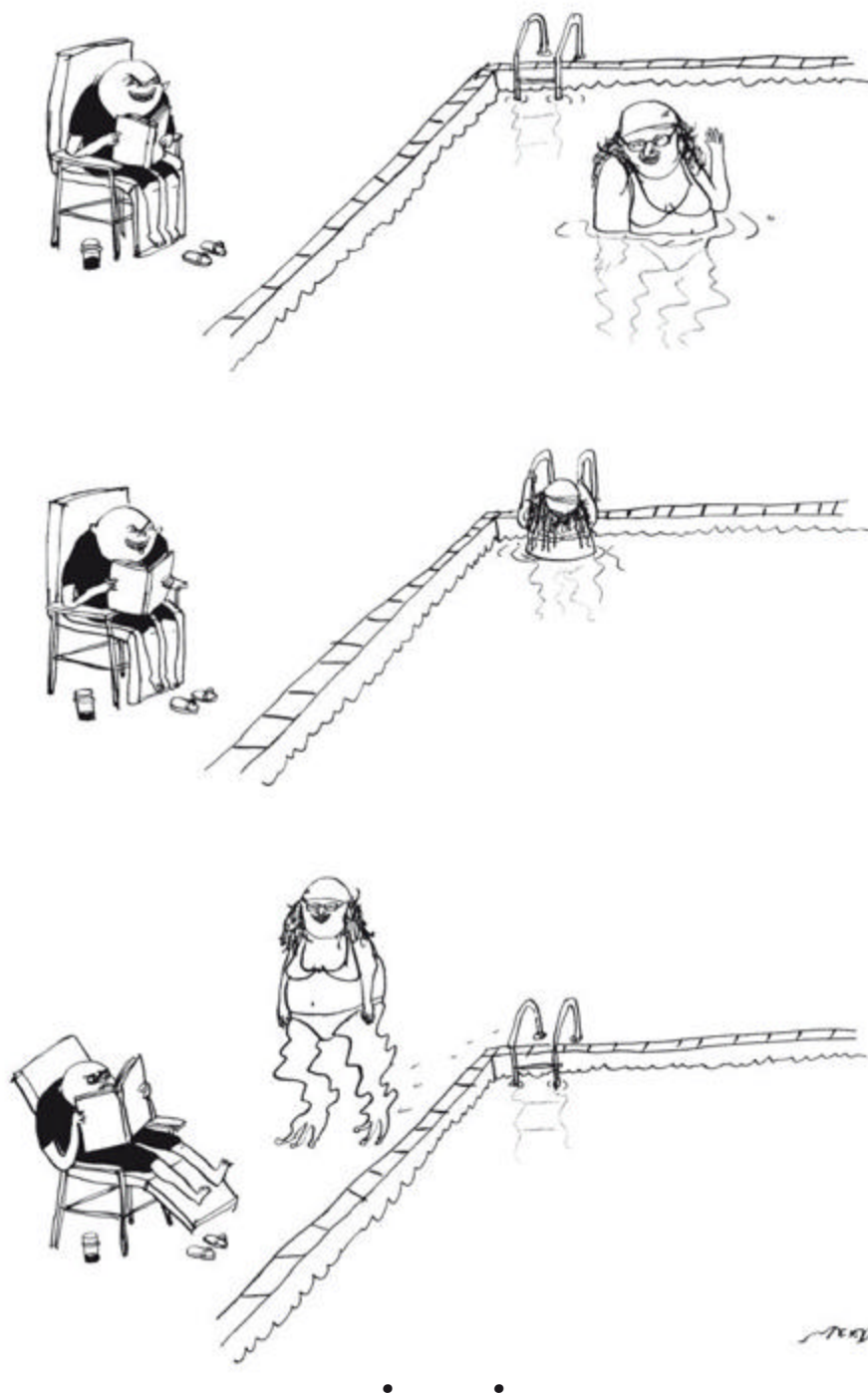
After spending the weekend in the Blount County Jail, Walli, Boertje-Obed, and Sister Megan were brought to federal court in shackles. They were charged with trespassing on government property, a misdemeanor. More serious charges were likely to be filed soon. Assistant U.S. Attorney Melissa Kirby asked the judge not to release them from jail. They were repeat offenders. They lived in other parts of the country, presented a flight risk, and could pose a “danger to the community.”

A few days later, Judge C. Clifford Shirley ignored the prosecutor’s objections and ruled that the defendants should be freed once they entered a plea. Sister Megan and Walli pleaded not guilty.

“I plead justified, because the building of nuclear weapons is a war crime,” Boertje-Obed said in court. “I plead for the downtrodden around the world who suffer the consequences of our nuclear weapons.” Judge Shirley entered a plea of not guilty for him.

Walli and Sister Megan later walked free. Boertje-Obed chose to remain in jail.

The Plowshares action at Y-12 attracted international attention. The fact that an eighty-two-year-old nun had broken into a high-security nuclear-weapons complex seemed unbelievable. But to some people familiar with the security arrangements at Y-12 the intrusion was the logical result of mismanagement that had plagued the facility for years. Although the federal government owned the land and most of the buildings, the equipment, and the fissile material at the Y-12 complex, private contractors now ran the facility for profit. During the Cold War, the weapons laboratories had been managed through an unusual arrangement of public and private oversight. The Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, for example, was operated by the University of California. Sandia Lab-



oratory was run by subsidiaries of A.T.&T. at no charge to the government. The weapons labs and manufacturing plants were run like nonprofits: they were supposed to serve the national interest. A decade ago, the management of America’s nuclear enterprise was largely privatized—a change that was justified with promises of greater efficiency. A new federal agency, the National Nuclear Security Administration, was created to oversee the private contractors. And the management of nuclear-security forces

was increasingly privatized as well.

During the summer of 2012, when the break-in occurred at Y-12, Wackenhut Services, Inc., was responsible for the security officers at the site. The company had been founded in the early nineteen-fifties by George Wackenhut, a former F.B.I. agent who pioneered the private security industry, gaining contracts from corporations and federal agencies, establishing close ties with the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. But in 2012 Wackenhut Services was no longer an American company. It had been acquired



*"And where do you see your mustache in five years?"*

by Group 4 Falck, once a Danish company, now a British one, known as G4S. In addition to protecting the weapons-grade uranium at Y-12 through a subsidiary, G4S provided security at rock concerts and banks and malls, operated private prisons, employed armed guards to defend embassies in Afghanistan and Iraq. The company operated in more than a hundred and twenty-five countries. Through mergers and acquisitions, it had rapidly become the third-largest private employer in the world, after Walmart and Foxconn. Most people had never heard of G4S until a few weeks before the Y-12 intrusion, when the company mishandled the security arrangements for the London Olympic Games. G4S trainees were allegedly caught cheating on bomb-detection tests. (The company says that training was conducted according to industry standards.) G4S failed to hire the number of security guards it had promised, and the British military had to send thirty-five hundred troops to the Olympics at the last minute.

Wackenhut's performance at Y-12 was not much better. A 2004 report by the Department of Energy's Office of

Inspector General found that security officers at Y-12 had been cheating on performance tests for years. Before responding to mock attacks, Wackenhut officers were told in advance which building at Y-12 would be targeted, which wall of the building would be attacked, and whether their adversaries would use diversionary tactics. In at least one case, the information allowed officers to prepare an effective response weeks in advance. And, before the tests, members of the security force allegedly disabled their Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System gear—removing the batteries, inserting the batteries backward, covering the laser sensors with tape or Vaseline—so that during a simulated gunfight they could not be "shot." Failing a performance test might reduce Wackenhut's fee from the government. Wackenhut employees not only cheated on the tests; they came up with the tests. (The company disputed the Inspector General's report.)

On the night of the Y-12 break-in, a camera that would have enabled security personnel to spot the intruders was out of commission. According to a document obtained by Frank Munger, a

reporter at the Knoxville *News-Sentinel*, about a fifth of the cameras on the fences surrounding the Protected Area were not working that night. One camera did capture someone climbing through a fence. But the security officer who might have seen the image was talking to another officer, not looking at his screen. Cameras and motion detectors at the site had been broken for months. The security equipment was maintained by Babcock & Wilcox, a private contractor that managed Y-12, while the officers who relied on the equipment worked for Wackenhut. Poor communication between the two companies contributed to long delays whenever something needed to be fixed. And it wasn't always clear who was responsible for getting it fixed. The Plowshares activists did set off an alarm. But security officers ignored it, because hundreds of false alarms occurred at Y-12 every month. Officers stationed inside the uranium-storage facility heard the hammering on the wall. But they assumed that the sounds were being made by workmen doing maintenance.

A few months before the break-in, the National Nuclear Security Administration had given Wackenhut high scores in a review of its security performance at Y-12, granting the company a large fee. Wackenhut was planning to eliminate the jobs of seventy guards at Y-12, in order to cut costs. Not long after the break-in, an investigation by the Department of Energy's Office of Inspector General found that, once again, Wackenhut security guards at Y-12 had been caught cheating on their performance tests. (The guards later testified that they had "no intent to cheat," according to a follow-up report by the Inspector General.)

Asked by the Secretary of Energy to evaluate the multiple security failures at Y-12, Norman R. Augustine, a former Under-secretary of the Army and former chief executive of Lockheed Martin, concluded that the root of the problem was clear: "a pervasive culture of tolerating the intolerable and accepting the unacceptable." Of all the failure analyses that Augustine had conducted in his long career, "none had been more difficult for me to comprehend than this one." He considered himself a strong defender of the



free-enterprise system but thought that the protection of nuclear weapons and fissile materials was so important that it should be handled by the federal government, not by private contractors.

During the second week of September, 2012, congressional hearings were held to discuss the security at Y-12. Representative Michael Turner, a Republican from Ohio, opened one of the hearings by saying, "It is outrageous to think that the greatest threat to the American public from weapons of mass destruction may be the incompetence of D.O.E. security. . . . This must never happen again." Sister Megan and Michael Walli attended the hearings but were not asked to testify. Nevertheless, Representative Joe Barton, a Republican from Texas, acknowledged that Sister Megan was in the audience. "Would you please stand up, Ma'am?" he asked. "We want to thank you for pointing out some of the problems in our security." Representative Edward Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, addressed Sister Megan directly: "Thank you for your actions. Thank you for your willingness to focus attention on this nuclear weapons buildup. . . . We thank you for your courage. . . . You should be praised because that's ultimately what the Sermon on the Mount is all about."

A federal grand jury had already handed down further indictments. In addition to the misdemeanor trespassing charge, the protesters now faced two felony counts. The first was for "willfully and maliciously" destroying property at Y-12. The second was for committing a "depredation against property of the United States and of the United States Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, Y-12 National Security Complex . . . in an amount exceeding \$1,000." To "depredate" means "to lay waste: plunder, ravage," according to Webster's. The felony counts could lead to a prison sentence of fifteen years. And, as lawyers representing the activists discussed a possible plea bargain with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Knoxville, the government threatened to file an even more serious charge: sabotage.

Although the Sabotage Act was

passed in 1918, at the height of the First World War, when America was gripped with the fear of German spies, the law has rarely been used against people who've actually committed sabotage. Instead, it has been used against labor organizers, opponents of the Vietnam War, and anti-nuclear activists. The statute's broad definition of sabotage—attempting or committing an act with the "intent to injure, interfere with, or obstruct the national defense of the United States"—has made the law a useful tool for punishing acts of civil disobedience.

Walli, Sister Megan, and Boertje-Obed refused to accept a plea bargain, and insisted on a trial by jury. The prosecution quickly dropped the trespassing charge and added sabotage to the indictment.

William P. Quigley, the attorney representing Walli, asked the judge to throw out the sabotage charge. A professor of law at Loyola University New Orleans, Quigley argued that the sabotage law was being selectively applied in this case. Plowshares activists who had committed similar nonviolent acts generally weren't accused of sabotage. Father Bix had been given a three-month prison sentence after breaking into the nuclear-weapons storage area at Kitsap in 2009. Sister Megan and the others now faced a possible thirty-five years behind bars.

Quigley was an expert on the "necessity defense" and hoped to use it in the Y-12 case. Dating back centuries to English common law, the defense enabled someone to be found innocent if a crime had been committed to avoid a greater harm. Crimes of necessity might include tossing valuable cargo overboard to prevent a ship from sinking, breaking into a drugstore to obtain life-saving medicine for someone in an emergency, shattering a store window to escape a fire. Sir Walter Scott, who was a judge as well as a novelist, believed that "necessity creates the law, it supersedes rules; and whatever is reasonable and just in such cases, is likewise legal."

The three activists had broken into Y-12, Quigley planned to argue, in order to avoid a nuclear holocaust. He had defended peace activists since the early nineteen-eighties and sympathized with many of their views. The

necessity defense was occasionally successful in state courts, where anti-nuclear protesters had walked free after explaining their actions to a jury. But since the early nineties federal judges have rarely permitted claims of necessity to be used in civil-disobedience cases.

At a pre-trial hearing, Boertje-Obed, representing himself, asked the court to permit the use of the necessity defense. The government had already submitted a brief seeking to preclude that defense. It would keep the jury from hearing evidence about the morality of nuclear weapons, international law, or the defendants' political and religious beliefs. The preparation for war crimes is a crime, Boertje-Obed argued, citing one of the Nuremberg principles used to prosecute the leadership of Nazi Germany. "So, when you build a nuclear weapon, you are planning and preparing to commit mass murder," he said. "You are giving your assent to the killing of civilians."

In response to those arguments, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey E. Theodore, citing Justice John Paul Stevens, portrayed all civil disobedience as anti-democratic. It was "a form of arrogance which organized society cannot tolerate." Theodore suggested that allowing the necessity defense in this case might justify its use by activists who had blown up an abortion clinic. "These defendants, they know," he told the court. "They're all recidivists when it comes to this. . . . They want to present their anti-nuclear agenda and they want the biggest forum they can get in order to do that. And the more they can espouse their views about operations at Y-12, or the horrors of nuclear weapons and things like that . . . the happier they are."

Judge Shirley forbade the use of the necessity defense and let the sabotage charge stand.

Walli, Boertje-Obed, and Sister Megan didn't deny breaking into Y-12, cutting the fences, and spraying graffiti. At their trial, in May, 2013, they described those actions matter-of-factly. The charge of damaging government property would be hard to beat. To obtain a guilty verdict on the two other charges, the government had to prove that repairing the damage at Y-12 cost more than a thousand dollars and that the three

## MORE THAN YOU GAVE

We have the town we call home wakening for dawn  
which isn't yet here but is promised, we have

our tired neighbors rising in ones and twos, we have  
the sky slowly separating itself from the houses

to become the sky while the stars blink a last time  
and vanish to make way for us to enter the great  
stage

of an ordinary Tuesday in ordinary time. We have  
our curses, our gripes, our lies all on the stale breath

of 6:37 A.M. in the city no one dreams, the Tuesday  
city  
in which we shall live for this day or not at all.

"Where are the angels?" I ask. This is a visionary  
moment  
in the history of time, incomplete without angels,

without at least Argente of the tarnished wings,  
or the mangled half-assed Incondante who speaks

only in riddles, or one-winged Sylvania who glows  
in the dark. All off in eternity doing their sacred  
numbers.

Instead at 6:43 A.M. we have Vartan Baghosian with  
a face  
seamed like a softball and Minky Schantz who  
pitched

three games for the Toledo Mud Hens in '39 and  
lost  
them all, we have the Volpe sisters who married

the attic on Brush Street and won't come down,  
we have me, fresh as last week, bitching about my  
back,

my bad ankle, we have psoriasis, heartburn, the  
four-day  
hangover, prostatitis, Jewish mothers, Catholic guilt,

we have the teen-age Woodward Ave. whores going

to bed alone at last, hugging no one for that long  
moment

before the young Madonnas rise from separate beds  
to open their shutters on whatever the day presents,

to pledge their virtue and their twitching,  
incomparable bodies  
to Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Tupperware. All  
this

in rooms where even in the gray dishwater dawn  
the chrome grill on an Admiral black-and-white  
TV

gleams like the chalice of Abraham. And from his  
corner  
the genius of this time and place, Uncle Nate,  
chomping

his first White Owl of the day, calls out for a  
doughnut  
and sweetened milky coffee to dunk it in and laces up

his high-tops and swears by the vision of his blind  
right eye  
he will have strange young pussy before the sun sets

on his miserable balding dome. Today we shall paint,  
for Nate is a true artist trained in the eight-hour day

to master the necessary and not the strung-out  
martyrs  
of El Greco or the brooding landscapes of an awful  
century.

No, today we paint the walls, the lintels, the ceilings,  
the dadoes, and the doodads of Mrs. Victoria Settle

formerly of Lake Park, Illinois, now come to grace  
our city with the myth of her late husband, her  
terriers,

her fake accent, her Victorian brooches, her perfect  
posture,  
and especially her money. Ask the gray windows

activists willfully set out to harm the national defense of the United States.

Before the trial, the government had claimed that the damage at Y-12 had cost an estimated seventy thousand dollars to repair. During the trial, Assistant U.S. Attorney Kirby said, "It was probably closer to the ballpark of \$8,000 worth of damage." According to subse-

quent testimony, more than seven thousand dollars of that amount was labor costs, and the labor was performed by Y-12 employees. The cost of the materials purchased to mend the broken fences and scrub the white walls clean was less impressive. It came to about seven hundred and sixty dollars.

As for the sabotage charge, Kirby as-

serted that harming the national defense of the United States had been the central aim of the protesters: "their whole purpose was to interfere with or obstruct Y-12 operations." The facility had to be shut down for two weeks; a delivery of special nuclear materials had been delayed; the reputation of Y-12, the National Nuclear Security



that look out on the remnants of winter a grand  
question:  
"Have I come all the way through the fires of hell,  
  
the torture of the dark night of the etc., so that I  
might inhale  
the leaden fumes of Giddens Golden Gate as the  
dogsboddy  
  
of Nathaniel Hawthorne Glenner, the autodidact of  
Twelfth Street?"  
It could be worse. It could be life without mortadella  
sandwiches,  
  
twenty-five-cent pineapple pies, and quarts of  
Pilsner  
at noon out on a manicured lawn in Grosse Pointe  
  
under a sun that never before caressed an Armenian  
or a Jew.  
We could be flogging Fuller brushes down the  
deadbeat streets  
  
of Paradise Valley or delivering trunks to the  
dormitories  
of the Episcopal ladies where no one tips or offers  
  
a pastry and a schnapps for the longed-for trip  
back to Sicily or Salonika; it could be the forge room  
  
at Ford Rouge where the young get old fast or die  
trying.  
So savor the hours as Nate recounts the day he  
hitchhiked  
  
to Toledo only to arrive too late to see the young  
Dempsey  
flatten Willard and claim the lily-white  
championship  
  
of the world. "Story of my life," says Nate, "the last to  
arrive,  
the first to leave." Not even Aesop could outdo our  
Nate,

our fabulist, whose name even is pure invention,  
a confabulation of his prison reading and his  
twelve-year  
  
formal education in the hobo camps of his long  
boyhood.  
Wanderlust, he tells us, hit him at age fifteen and  
not  
  
a moment too soon for Mr. Wilson was taking  
boys  
off to die in Europe and that was just about the  
time  
  
women discovered Nate or Nate discovered  
women,  
and they were something he wouldn't care to go  
without.  
  
Call it a long day if you want and a hard one, too,  
but remember we got more than we gave: we got  
myth,  
  
we got music, we got underpaid work, a cheap  
lunch  
with more to follow. On the long walk to the bus  
stop  
  
and the ride home we hear the birds gathering  
in the elms and maples thickening with summer  
finery,  
  
and no one cares if we sing to the orange sun  
that also seeks its rest, no one cares that our voices  
  
are harsh from cigarettes and our ears worthless,  
our timing off, and we've got the wrong words  
  
in the wrong places. Let's just give it what we have  
and when that's done give it a second time, one  
  
for us and one for Nate, and even a third wouldn't  
hurt.

—Philip Levine

Administration, and the United States had been hurt. The defense attorneys countered that all those consequences were impossible to foresee, since the three protesters were surprised that they could even get into the facility, let alone disrupt it. Far from endangering the country, the break-in had improved the security at Y-12. And, if calling for the

abolition of nuclear weapons threatened the national defense of the United States, then people like Henry Kissinger were saboteurs, too.

The trial was notable mostly for what it revealed about the participants. Boertje-Obed asked the jury to consider the philosophical difference between "real security" and "false security." Walli

called his service in Vietnam "employment as a terrorist for the United States government." He compared the morality of cutting the fences at Y-12 to that of cutting fences at Auschwitz. When asked by Assistant U.S. Attorney Theodore whether he had protested at nuclear-weapons facilities in other countries, Walli said that he had not,

adding, "I'm an indigent person. . . . It's pretty pricey going to Russia or North Korea." Theodore later compared the break-in at Y-12 to the attacks on 9/11. Since both had led to tighter security, he asked the jury, "Does that mean 9/11 was a good thing?"

From the witness stand, Sister Megan described her mystical, nature-loving form of Catholicism. All living things were miraculous, she believed. "I was aware of every moment being an imminent threat to the life and harmony of the planet," Sister Megan said under cross-examination. "Every moment, as we sit here now, is an imminent threat to the life of the planet, which is sacred."

A few moments earlier, Kirby had asked, "What do you think about what they do at Y-12?"

"I think with sadness that they are making a huge amount of money," Sister Megan said.

Walli, Boertje-Obed, and Sister Megan were convicted by the jury on all counts. The three were now classified as violent offenders, because of the conviction for attacking government property. They were handcuffed, shackled, and led from the courtroom to jail.

The United States is far more open about its nuclear-weapons programs than any other nation. But that openness, and the many security problems it has revealed, should not imply that the greatest threat of nuclear terrorism comes from sites in the United States. On the contrary, America may have the best nuclear-security systems in the world. The management challenges that the United States has faced are now being encountered by every other country that possesses nuclear weapons.

Pakistan tops the list of nations that cause terrorism experts the greatest concern. It has the world's fastest-growing nuclear arsenal. It has dispersed nuclear weapons to multiple locations, making them less vulnerable to attack by a foreign nation but more vulnerable to theft by terrorists. It has extremist groups seeking to infiltrate the military. And few people outside Pakistan know how its nuclear enterprise is really being run.

One of the top-secret documents obtained by Edward Snowden in 2013 says that American intelligence agencies have little "knowledge of the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and associated material." The question deeply concerns Russia as well. A classified State Department document released by WikiLeaks describes a meeting between Russian and American diplomats in Washington. "Islamists are not only seeking power in Pakistan but are also trying to get their hands on nuclear materials," an official at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. Perhaps a hundred and twenty-five thousand people were directly involved in Pakistan's nuclear-weapons and missile programs. The Russian official warned that "regardless

of the clearance process for these people, there is no way to guarantee that all are 100% loyal."

Remarkably little is known about the security arrangements at India's nuclear facilities. Its weapons aren't as widely dispersed as Pakistan's. But in both countries terrorists and extremists are more likely to seek plutonium and weapons-grade uranium. Fissile materials are easier to steal than nuclear weapons and much lighter to carry. An improvised explosive device can be made with just a hundred and twenty pounds of uranium or twenty pounds of plutonium. And those amounts don't have to be stolen all at once.

An insider at a nuclear facility might secretly remove a few ounces of fissile material every so often and accumulate a significant amount of it over time. That happened at a nuclear laboratory south of Moscow in 1992. Leonid Smirnov, an engineer at the plant, stole small vials of weapons-grade uranium for months, hoping to sell it. He was caught by chance, while talking to some drunken friends at a train station. The friends attracted the attention of the police, who arrested the whole group, searched Smirnov's bag, and found lead cannisters filled with weapons-grade uranium.

Russia has the most nuclear weapons and the largest amount of fissile material in the world. For more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the

United States and Russia worked closely together to improve nuclear security and reduce the danger of nuclear terrorism. Thousands of nuclear weapons were safely transported from former Soviet republics and dismantled. New storage facilities were built in Russia; modern security systems were introduced; fissile materials were removed from unguarded sites and locked away. But in December, 2014, Congress voted against additional funding for the nuclear-threat-reduction program. And Russia announced that it would end most of its cooperative work with the United States, despite the need to upgrade security at more than two hundred buildings. Sam Nunn, the former U.S. senator who helped to create the program, has often called the effort to prevent nuclear terrorism "a race between cooperation and catastrophe." The Russian decision, Nunn thinks, just made the latter more likely. Russia still has about two hundred and fifty thousand pounds of plutonium and about 1.4 million pounds of weapons-grade uranium.

"In our country, I firmly believe that breaking the law is not the answer," Judge Amul R. Thapar told the three defendants at the sentencing hearing. "And I can't help but think, as I listen to your allocutions, that if all that energy and passion was devoted to changing the laws, perhaps real change would have occurred by today."

Thapar felt some regret at putting "good people behind bars." The sentences he imposed were about half as long as those sought by the prosecution. Sister Megan was given three years in prison, Walli and Boertje-Obed five.

The activists were also required to pay for the damage at Y-12. The cost to repair that damage was no longer the roughly eight thousand dollars mentioned during the trial. The cost had somehow risen to \$52,953. Quigley, Walli's attorney, struggled to understand the huge discrepancy between those two sums. Babcock & Wilcox, the private contractor that operated Y-12, said that the eight-thousand-dollar figure didn't include "the incremental fringe rate," "the burden labor rate," or "the overhead" for getting the work done. Half a dozen painters had been brought to the





uranium-storage facility on a Saturday, at a cost of more than a hundred dollars an hour each. Dog handlers, who had searched the site for intruders, had cost almost five hundred dollars an hour. Videographers and photographers had been paid seven thousand dollars to produce images of the graffiti and the torn chain link. Despite the large sums of money involved, the most expensive material that had to be bought to undo this act of sabotage was twenty buckets of white paint.

After considering the threat of nuclear terrorism for many years, William C. Potter, the director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, and Gary Ackerman, the director of the Unconventional Weapons and Technology Division, at the University of Maryland, outlined some of the motives that could drive a terrorist group to obtain a nuclear weapon. The group might hope to create mass anxiety or mass casualties. It might want to deter attacks by a state with nuclear weapons. It might want to destroy a large area belonging to an adversary. It might want the prestige that nuclear weapons seem to confer, the status of being a world power. And it might seek to fulfill a religious goal. Groups that have an apocalyptic outlook—that believe “an irretrievably corrupt world must be purged to make way for a utopian future,” that celebrate violence as a means of achieving those aims—could be especially drawn to nuclear weapons, Potter and Ackerman found. Today, the number of those groups seems to be multiplying.

“The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it,” Osama bin Laden declared in 1998. Al Qaeda’s current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has said that his mood won’t improve until America vanishes. And he quoted, with approval, a radical imam’s view that using a nuclear weapon against the United States would be sanctified by God: “If a bomb were dropped on them, destroying ten million of them and burning as much of their land as they have burned of Muslim land, that would be permissible

without any need to mention any other proof.”

The Salafi jihadist world view promoted by Al Qaeda stresses the religious duty to purify corrupt states through violence, drive out infidels, and create a new caliphate—a perfect state in which religious and political leadership will be merged. Seth G. Jones, the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation, estimates that there are about fifty Salafi jihadist groups worldwide. They focus primarily on local struggles, battling the “near enemy,” not the “far enemy”: the United States. The groups most likely to commit terrorist acts on American soil are Al Qaeda, its offshoot Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). None have thus far engaged in nuclear terrorism, preferring more conventional and reliable forms of violence.

Salafi jihadists aren’t the only millenarian group that might be drawn to nuclear weapons. During the early nineties, the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) attempted to buy nuclear weapons in Russia, purchased land in Australia to mine for uranium, and sought technical assistance from scientists at Moscow’s leading institute for nuclear research. The leader of the cult, Shoko Asahara, was a partially blind yoga instructor who declared himself

the reincarnation of both Jesus Christ and the Hindu god Shiva. Asahara thought his followers would be the only ones to survive the coming nuclear apocalypse. In 1995, unable to obtain nuclear weapons, members of Aum Shinrikyo launched an attack on the Tokyo subway system with sarin nerve gas that killed thirteen people and injured more than five thousand. Despite having about a billion dollars in its bank account, perhaps fifty or sixty thousand followers worldwide, and the most advanced weapons-of-mass-destruction program ever created by a terrorist group, the doomsday cult was unknown to Western intelligence agencies until the Tokyo subway attack.

White supremacists in the United States have also fantasized about using nuclear weapons to purify society. Before Timothy McVeigh destroyed Oklahoma City’s federal building with a truck bomb, in 1995, he travelled the country selling copies of “The Turner Diaries,” a 1978 novel long considered the bible of the white-power movement. It features a protagonist who flies a plane carrying a nuclear weapon into the Pentagon, committing suicide in order to destroy Washington, D.C. In the book’s “happy” ending, white patriots use nuclear weapons stolen from Vandenberg Air Force Base, in California, to annihilate inferior races



*“Goodbye, Kevin. I could look the other way with the boozing and the skirt-chasing, but I did not sign up for bicycle clothes.”*

throughout the world. Although the threat of Islamic terrorism has received a great deal of media attention, since 9/11 more people have been killed in the United States by American extremists than by foreign jihadists.

Last month, President Barack Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy noted the risk of nuclear terrorism. "No threat poses as grave a danger . . . as the potential use of nuclear weapons or materials by irresponsible states or terrorists," it said. Although Washington, D. C., would be a likely target of such an attack, the issue seems to lack urgency there. Budget sequestration and the partisanship in Congress have greatly reduced spending on nuclear-security programs. The amount of money that will be saved this year by cutting those programs—about three hundred and forty million dollars—is equivalent to 0.06 per cent of the 2015 defense budget. Meanwhile, at least twenty-five countries now possess two pounds or more of weapons-grade fissile material, and some nuclear sites overseas don't even have armed guards.

When I visited the Y-12 National Security Complex a few months ago, the place looked like an odd mix of Silicon Valley and the industrial ruins of Detroit. The site has a few

shiny new buildings, some of the most advanced and precise machine tools in the world—and an abandoned steam plant in the middle of the complex, rusting and decayed, with grass growing in the cracks of surrounding pavement. Buildings and equipment dating back to the Manhattan Project are still in use. Inside one building, I saw calutrons—enormous contraptions, about fifteen feet high, relying on powerful magnets to enrich uranium—that were designed more than seventy years ago, and are still kept on standby to produce stable isotopes, if necessary. A dusty basement was filled with spare parts, gauges, huge vacuum tubes, unopened spools of cable marked with their date of manufacture (1944). The room felt like an exhibit at a museum of technology, a steampunk fantasy.

Inside the Protected Area, the security was impressive. Large coils of razor wire have been placed between fences to slow anyone trying to cut through them. I saw security guards with automatic weapons, plenty of video cameras, barriers to prevent car bombs and truck bombs. I have been told that if an intruder managed to get inside the storage facility, he or she would confront a series of lethal impediments before getting anywhere near the uranium.

Wackenhut is no longer responsible for the security at Y-12. Two months after the break-in, its contract was terminated, and Babcock & Wilcox took over the guard force. Creating a single, integrated management structure at the site promised to improve its security. But a couple of embarrassing incidents soon occurred. On June 6, 2013, Brenda L. Haptonstall, a sixty-two-year-old woman, was allowed to pass through the main entrance at Y-12 and drive the full length of the complex without being asked to show any identification. Haptonstall later said that she had been looking for a low-cost apartment building that she'd spotted in an ad. The sight of "nice officers waving her through with illuminated flashlight cones" didn't strike her as unusual, according to the police report. There's probably been an accident, she thought, driving into the high-security nuclear-weapons site. The following month, on the first anniversary of the Plowshares action at Y-12, a security guard accidentally fired his gun inside an armored vehicle. Fragments ricocheting off the interior armor injured two guards. Babcock & Wilcox's contract at Y-12 was not renewed.

Consolidated Nuclear Security (C.N.S.), a consortium headed by Bechtel and Lockheed Martin, has operated Y-12 since last July. C.N.S. is in charge of the security equipment and the security personnel at the site. Although the guard force there is largely unchanged, new managers run it. Morgan Smith, the chief operating officer of C.N.S., seems tough, competent, and blunt. He previously ran the Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory, a Bechtel facility north of Albany that helps maintain nuclear reactors for the U.S. Navy. Smith makes no excuses for the security lapses at Y-12 that preceded his arrival. "What happened in 2012 became something that could be used, going forward, in a very positive way across the complex," he says. All the employees at the site are now expected to feel personally responsible for its security. Smith is confident that Y-12 is a more secure place today than in the past. And he says that the guards want "to do everything possible to restore the pride and reputation" of their force.

Standing atop Chestnut Ridge, looking down at the Y-12 complex, I felt uneasy.

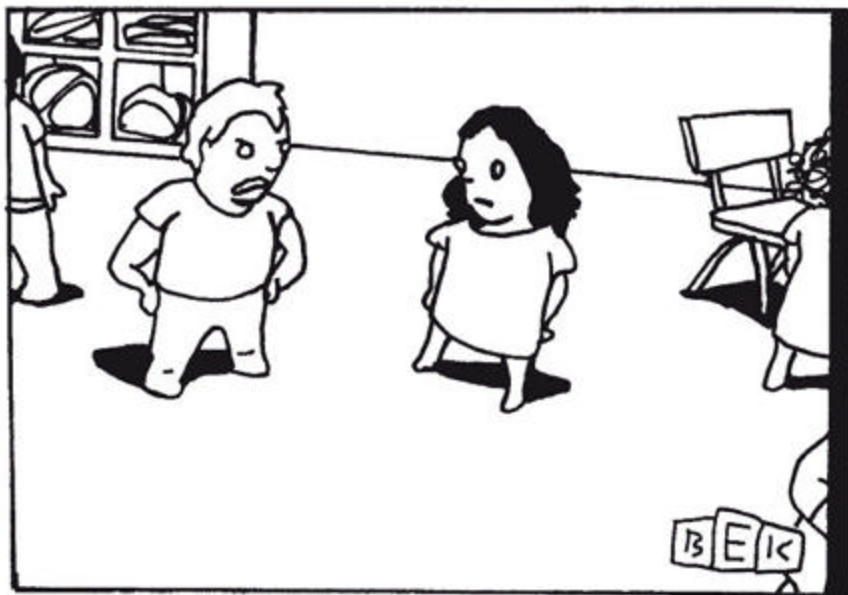




The valley that the site occupies is quite narrow, the hills overlooking it densely wooded. The fear of a sniper that had made Sergeant Riggs put on body armor before dealing with the Plowshares intruders suddenly made sense. Terrorists attacking Y-12 from the ridge would have the advantage of high ground and a great deal of cover. At night, they would be hard to see. Ideally, some of the trees on those hills would be chopped down for security reasons, regardless of what local environmentalists might think. From the ridge top, America's most important storage facility for weapons-grade uranium no longer looked so intimidating. It looked vulnerable and exposed. During the Middle Ages, castles were built at the top of a hill, not at the bottom.

Weeks later, I learned that others had expressed similar concerns about Y-12 for years. The initial design of the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility was a concrete bunker covered on top and on three sides by an earthen berm. When Babcock & Wilcox assumed management of Y-12, in 2000, it changed the design, claiming that a building aboveground would be less expensive. Four years later, the Department of Energy's Inspector General argued that an above-ground, fortress-like design would actually be more expensive and less secure. Danielle Brian, the head of the Project on Government Oversight, stressed those very points during congressional testimony in May, 2004. An aboveground storage facility would have five exposed surfaces—four walls and a roof—that terrorists could attack. A bermed facility would have only one. The most secure nuclear-weapons storage site in the United States, according to the military and civilian experts whom I consulted, is the Kirtland Underground Munitions Storage Complex, at Kirtland Air Force Base, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In satellite photographs, aside from an entrance ramp and an exit ramp, the structure is practically invisible.

The Y-12 National Security Complex may be known as the Fort Knox of Uranium, but the United States Bullion Depository, the real Fort Knox, in Kentucky, is guarded by federal officers. They are members of the U.S.



*"I know it's only a knock-knock joke, but you wouldn't say it unless there was some truth in it."*

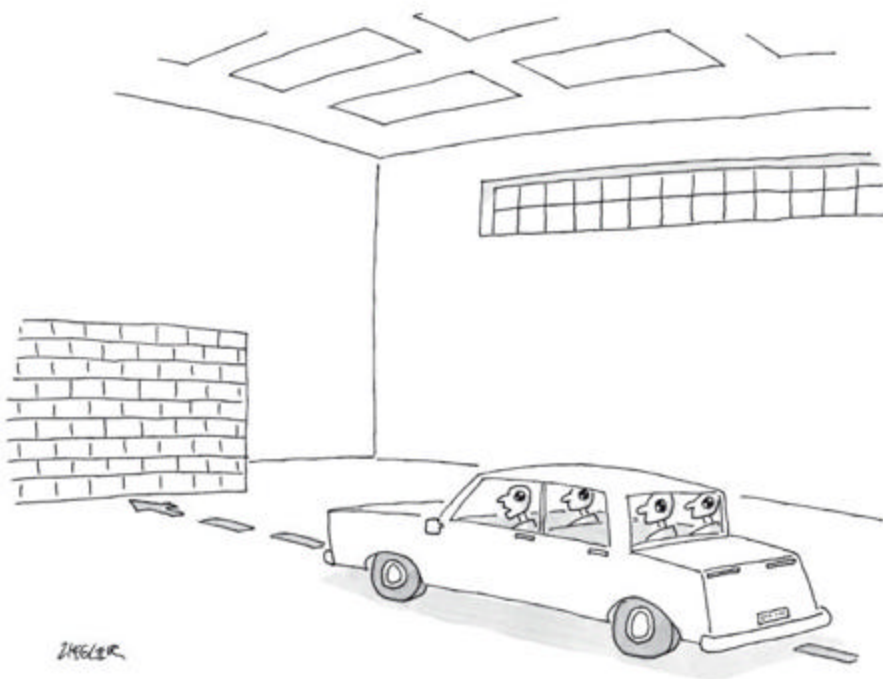
Mint Police, a law-enforcement agency that's been in continuous operation since 1792. And Fort Knox is right next door to Fort Knox, an Army base with thousands of soldiers. Nobody has ever broken into the bullion depository, and none of its roughly forty-five hundred tons of gold has ever been stolen. But that gold is nowhere near as valuable as what's being guarded by the private contractors at Y-12. A pound of gold is worth about twenty thousand dollars. A pound of weapons-grade uranium, on the black market, could be worth at least a hundred times that amount.

This summer will mark the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bomb's invention and its use against two Japanese cities. The anniversary will be commemorated by rallies and speeches demanding the abolition of nuclear weapons. That has been the professed desire of most American Presidents since 1945, including Harry Truman. But I've spoken with military officers, academics, and former Pentagon officials who think the notion of abolishing nuclear weapons is a dangerous and impossible fantasy. They would like the United States to modernize its nuclear-weapons and delivery systems instead.

Their arguments go something like this:

Fifty to sixty million people were killed during the Second World War. America's nuclear weapons not only ended that war but also played a crucial role in avoiding a third one. Our nuclear weapons prevented the Soviet domination of Japan and Western Europe. History has shown that traditional enemies who have nuclear weapons don't fight wars against one another. Nuclear deterrence works. Both China and Russia are now spending heavily to modernize their nuclear forces. If the United States doesn't modernize as well, it will appear weak. And, if the United States unilaterally reduces the number of weapons in its arsenal, allies currently shielded under its "nuclear umbrella," like Japan and South Korea, will build their own nuclear weapons—greatly increasing the likelihood of a nuclear war. Tampering with a national-security strategy that has kept the peace among world powers for seventy years would be a risky and irrational move. A treaty to abolish nuclear weapons would be as effective as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, an international agreement, signed by the United States in 1928, that outlawed war.

The Catholic Church once agreed with many of those arguments. For



*"Seat belts unfastened? Excellent."*

most of the Cold War, the Vatican was staunchly anti-Communist, and nuclear deterrence was blessed as a means of containing the influence of the Soviet Union. Last December, the Vatican released a statement that broke from decades of Church teaching on nuclear weapons. The distinction between having them and using them seems to have vanished. "Now is the time to affirm not only the immorality of nuclear weapons, but the immorality of their possession, thereby clearing the road to abolition," the Vatican said. And Dorothy Day, once mocked and reviled, is now being promoted for sainthood by Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, the conservative Archbishop of New York.

The Department of Justice doesn't seem proud of having imprisoned the Plowshares activists who broke into Y-12. Nobody at the Justice Department or the U.S. Attorney's Office in Knoxville would discuss the case with me. Nor would the two prosecutors who handled the case.

Sister Megan Rice is currently imprisoned at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn. My request to visit her was denied by Kimberly

Ask-Carlson, the prison's warden. When I appealed the decision, my request was denied again. Asked for an explanation, Ask-Carlson wrote me a letter that said, "I have decided to deny your request due to safety and security concerns." When I inquired whose safety and security might be jeopardized by my visit, a prison spokesman declined to answer. Sister Megan is eighty-five, one of the oldest women in the federal prison system, and she has a heart condition. During roughly the same period in which the Justice Department refused to let me meet with her for security reasons, the National Nuclear Security Administration allowed me to visit three high-security nuclear-weapons sites.

I corresponded with Sister Megan for months, and she was eventually allowed to speak with me on the phone. We talked about her upbringing in Manhattan, her parents, and their commitment to racial equality in the nineteen-thirties. She told me about her years in Africa and her introduction to the peace movement. We discussed what happened at Y-12. But the subject that Sister Megan now seems the most passionate about is the suffering of her fellow-inmates. She is confined in a

dormitory, not a cell. It has about sixty bunk beds, separated from one another by a few feet, without any partitions. There is no privacy, and the room can get "shrieking" loud. Many of the women seem to have been incarcerated for drug offenses. She thinks that most of them have been the victims of abuse. Instead of complaining or focussing on her own case, she has encouraged inmates to write to me about theirs. At the end of a conversation that felt too brief, Sister Megan said, "Bless you, brother. And thanks."

Michael Walli is being held at the Federal Correctional Institution, McKean, a medium-security facility in northwest Pennsylvania. I wasn't allowed to visit him, either, but we spoke on the phone for an hour and a half. His recall of dates and numbers is extraordinary, and, despite being a high-school dropout, he readily quotes passages of the Bible and lines from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches. Walli believes that King is literally a saint, despite having been a Baptist, and considers Sister Megan to be a prophet of God. When I asked about the sabotage charge, Walli let loose. "Well, the U.S. government has trespassed against its own constitutional, legal obligations by its torture policies, its assassination campaigns, its illegal wars, a whole bunch of illegal weapons besides the nuclear weapons," he said. "The U.S. government is a failed, rogue, terrorist nation."

As for the Y-12 break-in, Walli thinks it would have received more media coverage if they'd been shot. And he was prepared for that to happen. "I'm ready to go into the afterlife," Walli said. "My citizenship is in Heaven. When I go off into the judgment seat before Jesus Christ, the just judge, I'm not going to wave a U.S. flag in Jesus' face, that's for sure." He will be sixty-nine years old when he's released.

Leavenworth Penitentiary is the oldest federal prison and one of the most unsettling. Built more than a century ago, in Kansas, it was designed to look like the U.S. Capitol. Imagine the Capitol, flattened, stretched, surrounded by forty-foot-high walls made of red brick and topped with gun towers. Leavenworth was a maximum-security prison for



more than a century, filled with bank robbers, train robbers, killers, mobsters, rapists. As I headed up the steep concrete steps to see Gregory Boertje-Obed, I thought about the thousands of violent inmates who had been locked away there. Many had reached the top of the stairs, walked into the place, and never walked out.

I met with Boertje-Obed in a small visiting room filled with beige plastic chairs. The only other people in the room were a prison official and a corrections officer, both of them polite and friendly and not especially interested in our conversation. Leavenworth is a medium-security facility today. But gang members, drug dealers, and murderers are still incarcerated there, amid a prison culture rigidly divided by race. The typical inmate is serving a ten-year sentence. In an environment that would frighten most people, Boertje-Obed seemed calm, grounded, and philosophical. He was there for a reason, and was just fine with it.

As a young man, Boertje-Obed seemed an unlikely candidate for a cell block. He grew up in a series of Iowa towns—Pella, Sioux Center, Ames. His father was a biology teacher, and the family was deeply religious. They attended two services at the local Dutch Reformed church every Sunday. Boertje-Obed went to Tulane University in 1973, joined the Army R.O.T.C. to help cover the tuition, and then entered a graduate program at Louisiana State University to study social psychology. He wrote a master's thesis on whether personality tests could predict leadership ability and hoped to become an academic researcher. Before that could happen, he became a first lieutenant in the Army to fulfill his R.O.T.C. obligations.

Assigned to a combat-engineer battalion at Fort Polk, in central Louisiana, Boertje-Obed trained to be a supervisor at a medical-aid station. In battle, his job would be to organize the care of the wounded. In 1980, he was part of a major field exercise in Louisiana. During the war game, a Soviet armored column headed south from Monroe toward his unit. His battalion camped out in the fields and prepared for a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack, donning gas masks and protective suits.

Boertje-Obed was in charge of the medics. He had to make sure that everyone wore the masks for an hour, then two hours, then three, four, five. Members of his unit began to cheat, pulling the masks away from their faces. It was excruciating to wear the masks for ten minutes, let alone four or five hours. The whole exercise seemed pointless to Boertje-Obed; he'd die during a real attack.

Boertje-Obed had begun reading about Dorothy Day, who had encouraged workers at munitions plants to walk away from their jobs. "God will lead and provide for you," she had assured them. It seemed as though Day were speaking directly to him. He read the Bible and books about civil disobedience. He started to believe that you should love your enemies. The field exercise was his tipping point. Nope, he thought. I won't cooperate anymore in the planning for nuclear war.

Boertje-Obed left the Army, returned to Baton Rouge, and took theology classes at L.S.U. He became involved in anti-nuclear activism, studied nonviolent resistance with Daniel Berrigan, moved to Jonah House, and lived there for seventeen years. Boertje-Obed and Philip Berrigan painted houses together three or four times a week and planned break-ins at nuclear-weapons sites. Boertje-Obed's life became a series of protests, arrests, jailings, and imprisonments on behalf of peace. At one point, like the Berrigans, he went on the run. But that was an exception. On a fundamental level, he accepted responsibility for his actions. When, during a Plowshares trial, a court-appointed attorney tried to persuade a jury that he was innocent, pointing to the absence of fingerprints or photographs linking him to the scene, Boertje-Obed stood up, told the jury he'd done it, and started to explain why. The judge cited him for contempt of court.

In the months leading up to the Y-12 break-in, Boertje-Obed was happily married, living at the Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker House in Duluth, and painting houses. One of the few times that he cross-examined a government

witness during the trial in Knoxville was to question the amount of paint that Babcock & Wilcox bought to cover up the graffiti. He thought twenty buckets sounded excessive.

Boertje-Obed was slight and soft-spoken, wearing a beige prison uniform that looked a couple of sizes too big. But, as I listened to him talk about his faith and his devotion to nonviolence it became clear that deep down he was harder and tougher than most of the inmates in the yard. Henry David Thoreau spent a single night in jail as an act of civil disobedience and then wrote a famous essay about it. Boertje-Obed had already spent more than a thousand nights behind bars for his beliefs and may spend at least a thousand more. He seemed to have no regrets. "You must live your Christian beliefs fully," he told me, "as though judgment may come at any moment."

Boertje-Obed said that no one from the government has ever asked him for suggestions about how the security at nuclear-weapon sites could be improved. He certainly doesn't want terrorists to do what he's done. The Bureau of Prisons sent him to Leavenworth, nine hours away from his family, he said, because it considers him to be a "domestic terrorist." Boertje-Obed plays a lot of Scrabble now, belongs to a Bible-study group, and spends time teaching a man in his cell block how to read. If he's attacked by another inmate, he won't fight back. But he might intervene to separate other inmates who are fighting.

Right before the corrections officer led him out of the room, Boertje-Obed looked me in the eye and gave a subtle little smile.

I stood across the street from Leavenworth Penitentiary, taking in the view. The Stars and Stripes hung from a flagpole in front of the steps, sunshine glistened in the razor wire, the sky was clear and blue. The prison looked like an image on an old postcard, a haunting, uniquely American symbol of state power. And a thought occurred to me: the walls of the penitentiary guarding this pacifist were taller and more impenetrable than any of the fences at Y-12. ♦





PORTFOLIO BY SAUL LEITER

## HIDDEN DEPTHS

When the photographer Saul Leiter died, in 2013, just shy of his ninetieth birthday, his East Village apartment was stacked with boxes of pictures. Because recognition, and a bracing shot of fame, had come to him late in life, he'd only begun to rouse himself from contented obscurity and sort through decades of uncatalogued work. In Leiter's last years, previously unseen photographs, many of New York in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, appeared regularly in exhibitions and publications, but they were only a fraction of what has come to light since his death, including the images on these pages. The French painter Pierre Bonnard was a key influence, and Leiter saw the city's streets through a Neo-Impressionist lens, often with a shop window or a mirror to provide a layer of shimmering soft focus. His take was glancing and indirect but tender—the fond regard of a lover who sees and forgives every flaw.

—Vince Aletti

*When Leiter agreed to work for Harper's Bazaar, in 1958, he said, with characteristic modesty, "I thought that maybe fashion was something I*





*could do." All he needed was the mix of glamour and drama he brought to this untitled image, photographed circa 1955.*





SAUL LEITER ESTATE/COURTESY HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY

*"I was very lazy and stuck to my neighborhood," Leiter said. "San Carlo Restaurant, 1952" was taken near his apartment.*





*A painter before he picked up a camera, Leiter was alert to found art, like the drawing in "Graffiti Heads, 1950."*





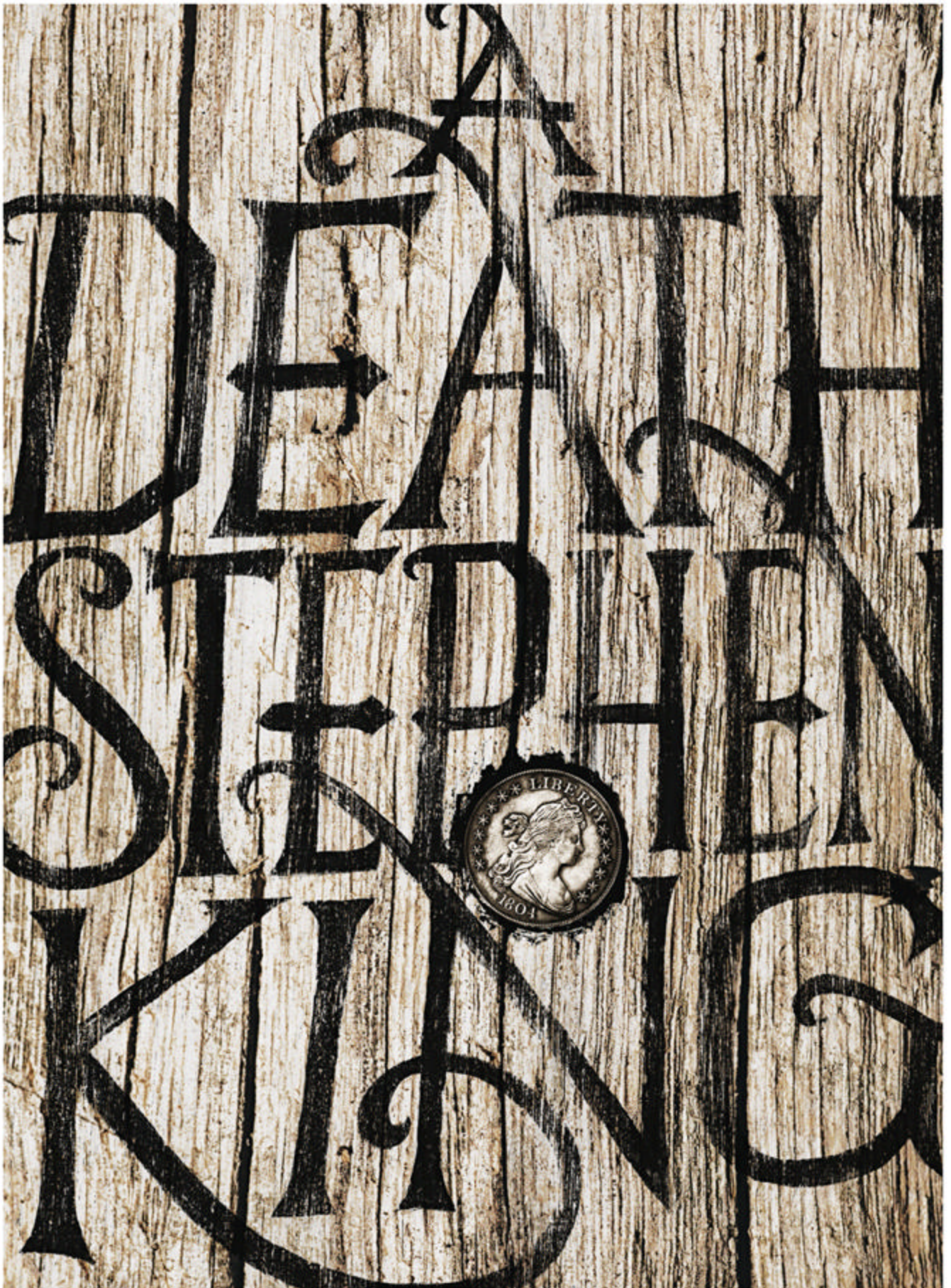
*He liked the fact that “sometimes you don’t know what’s going on” in such multilayered images as “Christmas, 1950s.”*





*Leiter had an eye for the way the city looked through a streaked and foggy window, as in "Snow, 1960."*







Jim Trusdale had a shack on the west side of his father's gone-to-seed ranch, and that was where he was when Sheriff Barclay and half a dozen deputized townsmen found him, sitting in the one chair by the cold stove, wearing a dirty barn coat and reading an old issue of the *Black Hills Pioneer* by lantern light. Looking at it, anyway.

Sheriff Barclay stood in the doorway, almost filling it up. He was holding his own lantern. "Come out of there, Jim, and do it with your hands up. I ain't drawn my pistol and don't want to."

Trusdale came out. He still had the newspaper in one of his raised hands. He stood there looking at the sheriff with his flat gray eyes. The sheriff looked back. So did the others, four on horseback and two on the seat of an old buckboard with "Hines Mortuary" printed on the side in faded yellow letters.

"I notice you ain't asked why we're here," Sheriff Barclay said.

"Why are you here, Sheriff?"

"Where is your hat, Jim?"

Trusdale put the hand not holding the newspaper to his head as if to feel for his hat, which was a brown plainsman and not there.

"In your place, is it?" the sheriff asked. A cold breeze kicked up, blowing the horses' manes and flattening the grass in a wave that ran south.

"No," Trusdale said. "I don't believe it is."

"Then where?"

"I might have lost it."

"You need to get in the back of the wagon," the sheriff said.

"I don't want to ride in no funeral hack," Trusdale said. "That's bad luck."

"You got bad luck all over," one of the men said. "You're painted in it. Get in."

Trusdale went to the back of the buckboard and climbed up. The breeze kicked again, harder, and he turned up the collar of his barn coat.

The two men on the seat of the buckboard got down and stood either side of it. One drew his gun; the other did not. Trusdale knew their faces but not their names. They were town men. The sheriff and the other four went into his shack. One of them was Hines, the undertaker. They were in there for some time. They even opened the stove and dug through the ashes. At last they came out.

"No hat," Sheriff Barclay said. "And

we would have seen it. That's a damn big hat. Got anything to say about that?"

"It's too bad I lost it. My father gave it to me back when he was still right in the head."

"Where is it, then?"

"Told you, I might have lost it. Or had it stoled. That might have happened, too. Say, I was going to bed right soon."

"Never mind going to bed. You were in town this afternoon, weren't you?"

"Sure he was," one of the men said, mounting up again. "I seen him myself. Wearing that hat, too."

"Shut up, Dave," Sheriff Barclay said.

"Were you in town, Jim?"

"Yes sir, I was," Trusdale said.

"In the Chuck-a-Luck?"

"Yes sir, I was. I walked from here, and had two drinks, and then I walked home. I guess the Chuck-a-Luck's where I lost my hat."

"That's your story?"

Trusdale looked up at the black November sky. "It's the only story I got."

"Look at me, son."

Trusdale looked at him.

"That's your story?"

"Told you, the only one I got," Trusdale said, looking at him.

Sheriff Barclay sighed. "All right, let's go to town."

"Why?"

"Because you're arrested."

"Ain't got a brain in his fuckin' head," one of the men remarked. "Makes his daddy look smart."

They went to town. It was four miles. Trusdale rode in the back of the mortuary wagon, shivering against the cold. Without turning around, the man holding the reins said, "Did you rape her as well as steal her dollar, you hound?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Trusdale said.

The rest of the trip continued in silence except for the wind. In town, people lined the street. At first they were quiet. Then an old woman in a brown shawl ran after the funeral hack in a sort of limping hobble and spat at Trusdale. She missed, but there was a spatter of applause.

At the jail, Sheriff Barclay helped Trusdale down from the wagon. The wind was brisk, and smelled of snow. Tumbleweeds blew straight down Main Street and toward the town water tower,

where they piled up against a shakepole fence and rattled there.

"Hang that baby killer!" a man shouted, and someone threw a rock. It flew past Trusdale's head and clattered on the board sidewalk.

Sheriff Barclay turned and held up his lantern and surveyed the crowd that had gathered in front of the mercantile. "Don't do that," he said. "Don't act foolish. This is in hand."

The sheriff took Trusdale through his office, holding him by his upper arm, and into the jail. There were two cells. Barclay led Trusdale into the one on the left. There was a bunk and a stool and a waste bucket. Trusdale made to sit down on the stool, and Barclay said, "No. Just stand there."

The sheriff looked around and saw the possemen crowding into the doorway. "You all get out of here," he said.

"Otis," the one named Dave said, "what if he attacks you?"

"Then I will subdue him. I thank you for doing your duty, but now you need to scat."

When they were gone, Barclay said, "Take off that coat and give it to me."

Trusdale took off his barn coat and began shivering. Beneath he was wearing nothing but an undershirt and corduroy pants so worn the wale was almost gone and one knee was out. Sheriff Barclay went through the pockets of the coat and found a twist of tobacco in a page of an R.W. Sears Watch Company catalogue, and an old lottery ticket promising a payoff in pesos. There was also a black marble.

"That's my lucky marble," Trusdale said. "I had it since I was a boy."

"Turn out your pants pockets."

Trusdale turned them out. He had a penny and three nickels and a folded-up news clipping about the Nevada silver rush that looked as old as the Mexican lottery ticket.

"Take off your boots."

Trusdale took them off. Barclay felt inside them. There was a hole in one sole the size of a dime.

"Now your stockings."

Barclay turned them inside out and tossed them aside.

"Drop your pants."

"I don't want to."

"No more than I want to see what's in there, but drop them anyway."

Trusdale dropped his pants. He wasn't wearing underdrawers.

"Turn around and spread your cheeks."

Trusdale turned, grabbed his buttocks, and pulled them apart. Sheriff Barclay winced, sighed, and poked a finger into Trusdale's anus. Trusdale groaned. Barclay removed his finger, wincing again at the soft pop, and wiped his finger on Trusdale's undershirt.

"Where is it, Jim?"

"My hat?"

"You think I went up your ass looking for your hat? Or through the ashes in your stove? Are you being smart?"

Trusdale pulled up his trousers and buttoned them. Then he stood shivering and barefoot. An hour earlier he had been at home, reading his newspaper and thinking about starting a fire in the stove, but that seemed long ago.

"I've got your hat in my office."

"Then why did you ask about it?"

"To see what you'd say. That hat is all settled. What I really want to know is where you put the girl's silver dollar. It's not in your house, or your pockets, or up your ass. Did you get to feeling guilty and throw it away?"

"I don't know about no silver dollar. Can I have my hat back?"

"No. It's evidence. Jim Trusdale, I'm arresting you for the murder of Rebecca Cline. Do you have anything you want to say to that?"

"Yes, sir. That I don't know no Rebecca Cline."

The sheriff left the cell, closed the door, took a key from the wall, and locked it. The tumblers screeched as they turned. The cell mostly housed drunks and was rarely locked. He looked in at Trusdale and said, "I feel sorry for you, Jim. Hell ain't too hot for a man who'd do such a thing."

"What thing?"

The sheriff clumped away without any reply.

Trusdale stayed there in the cell, eating grub from Mother's Best, sleeping on the bunk, shitting and pissing in the bucket, which was emptied every two days. His father didn't come to see him, because his father had gone foolish in his eighties, and was now being cared for by a couple of squaws, one Sioux and the other Cheyenne. Sometimes they stood on the porch of the deserted bunkhouse and sang hymns in harmony. His bro-

ther was in Nevada, hunting for silver.

Sometimes children came and stood in the alley outside his cell, chanting, "Hangman, hangman, come on down." Sometimes men stood out there and threatened to cut off his privates. Once, Rebecca Cline's mother came and said she would hang him herself, were she allowed. "How could you kill my baby?" she asked through the barred window. "She was only ten years old, and 'twas her birthday."

"Ma'am," Trusdale said, standing on the bunk so that he could look down at her upturned face. "I didn't kill your baby nor no one."

"Black liar," she said, and went away.

Almost everyone in town attended the child's funeral. The squaws went. Even the two whores who plied their trade in the Chuck-a-Luck went. Trusdale heard the singing from his cell, as he squatted over the bucket in the corner.

Sheriff Barclay telegraphed Fort Pierre, and after a week or so the circuit-riding judge came. He was newly appointed and young for the job, a dandy with long blond hair down his back like Wild Bill Hickok. His name was Roger Mizell. He wore small round spectacles, and in both the Chuck-a-Luck and Mother's Best proved himself a man with an eye for the ladies, although he wore a wedding band.

There was no lawyer in town to serve as Trusdale's defense, so Mizell called on George Andrews, owner of the mercantile, the hostelry, and the Good Rest Hotel. Andrews had got two years of higher education at a business school back East. He said he would serve as Trusdale's attorney only if Mr. and Mrs. Cline agreed.

"Then go see them," Mizell said. He was in the barbershop, tilted back in the chair and taking a shave. "Don't let the grass grow under your feet."

"Well," Mr. Cline said, after Andrews had stated his business, "I got a question. If he doesn't have someone to stand for him, can they still hang him?"

"That would not be American justice," Andrews said. "And although we are not one of the United States just yet, we will be soon."

"Can he wriggle out of it?" Mrs. Cline asked.





"No, ma'am," Andrews said. "I don't see how."

"Then do your duty and God bless you," Mrs. Cline said.

The trial lasted through one November morning and halfway into the afternoon. It was held in the municipal hall, and on that day there were snow flurries as fine as wedding lace. Slate-gray clouds rolling toward town threatened a bigger storm. Roger Mizell, who had familiarized himself with the case, served as prosecuting attorney as well as judge.

"Like a banker taking out a loan from himself and then paying himself interest," one of the jurors was overheard to say during the lunch break at Mother's Best, and although nobody disagreed with this, no one suggested that it was a bad idea. It had a certain economy, after all.

Prosecutor Mizell called half a dozen witnesses, and Judge Mizell never objected once to his line of questioning. Mr. Cline testified first, and Sheriff Barclay came last. The story that emerged was a simple one. At noon on the day of Rebecca Cline's murder, there had been a birthday party, with cake and ice cream. Several of Rebecca's friends had attended. Around two o'clock, while the little girls were playing Pin the Tail on the Donkey and Musical Chairs, Jim Trusdale entered the Chuck-a-Luck and ordered a knock of whiskey. He was wearing his plainsman hat. He made the drink last, and when it was gone he ordered another.

Did he at any point take off the hat? Perhaps hang it on one of the hooks by the door? No one could remember.

"Only I never seen him without it," Dale Gerard, the barman, said. "He was partial to that hat. If he did take it off, he probably laid it on the bar beside him. He had his second drink, and then he went on his way."

"Was his hat on the bar when he left?" Mizell asked.

"No, sir."

"Was it on one of the hooks when you closed up shop for the night?"

"No, sir."

Around three o'clock that day, Rebecca Cline left her house at the south end of town to visit the apothecary on Main Street. Her mother had told her

she could buy some candy with her birthday dollar, but not eat it, because she had had sweets enough for one day. When five o'clock came and she hadn't returned home, Mr. Cline and some other men began searching for her. They found her in Barker's Alley, between the stage depot and the Good Rest. She had been strangled. Her silver dollar was gone. It was only when the grieving father took her in his arms that the men saw Trusdale's broad-brimmed



leather hat. It had been hidden beneath the skirt of the girl's party dress.

During the jury's lunch hour, hammering was heard from behind the stage depot and not ninety paces from the scene of the crime. This was the gallows going up. The work was supervised by the town's best carpenter, whose name, appropriately enough, was Mr. John House. Big snow was coming, and the road to Fort Pierre would be impassable, perhaps for a week, perhaps for the entire winter. There were no plans to jug Trusdale in the local calaboose until spring. There was no economy in that.

"Nothing to building a gallows," House told folks who came to watch. "A child could build one of these."

He told how a lever-operated beam would run beneath the trapdoor, and how it would be axle-greased to make sure there wouldn't be any last-minute holdups. "If you have to do a thing like this, you want to do it right the first time," House said.

In the afternoon, George Andrews put Trusdale on the stand. This occasioned some hissing from the spectators, which Judge Mizell gavelled down, promising to clear the courtroom if folks couldn't behave themselves.

"Did you enter the Chuck-a-Luck Saloon on the day in question?" Andrews asked when order had been restored.

"I guess so," Trusdale said. "Otherwise I wouldn't be here."

There was some laughter at that,

which Mizell also gavelled down, although he was smiling himself and did not issue a second admonition.

"Did you order two drinks?"

"Yes, sir, I did. Two was all I had money for."

"But you got another dollar right quick, didn't you, you hound!" Abel Hines shouted.

Mizell pointed his gavel first at Hines, then at Sheriff Barclay, sitting in the front row. "Sheriff, escort that man out and charge him with disorderly conduct, if you please."

Barclay escorted Hines out but did not charge him with disorderly conduct. Instead, he asked what had got into him.

"I'm sorry, Otis," Hines said. "It was seeing him sitting there with his bare face hanging out."

"You go on downstreet and see if John House needs some help with his work," Barclay said. "Don't come back in here until this mess is over."

"He's got all the help he needs, and it's snowing hard now."

"You won't blow away. Go on."

Meanwhile, Trusdale continued to testify. No, he hadn't left the Chuck-a-Luck wearing his hat, but hadn't realized it until he got to his place. By then, he said, he was too tired to walk all the way back to town in search of it. Besides, it was dark.

Mizell broke in. "Are you asking this court to believe you walked four miles without realizing you weren't wearing your damn hat?"

"I guess since I wear it all the time I just figured it must be there," Trusdale said. This elicited another gust of laughter.

Barclay came back in and took his place next to Dave Fisher. "What are they laughing at?"

"Dummy don't need a hangman," Fisher said. "He's tying the knot all by himself. It shouldn't be funny, but it's pretty comical, just the same."

"Did you encounter Rebecca Cline in that alley?" George Andrews asked in a loud voice. With every eye on him, he had discovered a heretofore hidden flair for the dramatic. "Did you encounter her and steal her birthday dollar?"

"No, sir," Trusdale said.

"Did you kill her?"

"No, sir. I didn't even know who she was."

Mr. Cline rose from his seat and

shouted, "You did it, you lying son of a bitch!"

"I ain't lying," Trusdale said, and that was when Sheriff Barclay believed him.

"I have no further questions," Andrews said, and walked back to his seat.

Trusdale started to get up, but Mizell told him to sit still and answer a few more questions.

"Do you continue to contend, Mr. Trusdale, that someone stole your hat while you were drinking in the Chuck-a-Luck, and that someone put it on, and went into the alley, and killed Rebecca Cline, and left it there to implicate you?"

Trusdale was silent.

"Answer the question, Mr. Trusdale."

"Sir, I don't know what 'implicate' means."

"Do you expect us to believe someone framed you for this heinous murder?"

Trusdale considered, twisting his hands together. At last he said, "Maybe somebody took it by mistake and threwed it away."

Mizell looked out at the rapt gallery. "Did anyone here take Mr. Trusdale's hat by mistake?"

There was silence, except for the snow hitting the windows. The first big storm of winter had arrived. That was the winter townfolk called the Wolf Winter, because the wolves came down from the Black Hills in packs to hunt for garbage.

"I have no more questions," Mizell said. "And due to the weather we are going to dispense with any closing statements. The jury will retire to consider a verdict. You have three choices, gentlemen—innocent, manslaughter, or murder in the first degree."

"Girlslaughter, more like it," someone remarked.

Sheriff Barclay and Dave Fisher retired to the Chuck-a-Luck. Abel Hines joined them, brushing snow from the shoulders of his coat. Dale Gerard served them schooners of beer on the house.

"Mizell might not have had any more questions," Barclay said, "but I got one. Never mind the hat. If Trusdale killed her, how come we never found that silver dollar?"

"Because he got scared and threw it away," Hines said.

"I don't think so. He's too bone-stupid. If he'd had that dollar, he'd have

gone back to the Chuck-a-Luck and drunk it up."

"What are you saying?" Dave asked. "That you think he's innocent?"

"I'm saying I wish we'd found that cartwheel."

"Maybe he lost it out a hole in his pocket."

"He didn't have any holes in his pockets," Barclay said. "Only one in his boot, and it wasn't big enough for a dollar to get through." He drank some of his beer. The tumbleweeds blowing up Main Street looked like ghostly brains in the snow.

The jury took an hour and a half. "We voted to hang him on the first ballot," Kelton Fisher said later, "but we wanted it to look decent."

Mizell asked Trusdale if he had anything to say before sentence was passed.

"I can't think of nothing," Trusdale said. "Just I never killed that girl."

The storm blew for three days. John House asked Barclay how much he reckoned Trusdale weighed, and Barclay said he guessed the man went around one-forty. House made a dummy out of burlap sacks and filled it with stones, weighing it on the hostelry scales until the needle stood pat on one-forty. Then he hanged the dummy while half the town stood around in the snowdrifts and watched. The trial run went all right.

On the night before the execution, the weather cleared. Sheriff Barclay told Trusdale he could have anything he wanted for dinner. Trusdale asked for steak and eggs, with home fries on the side soaked in gravy. Barclay paid for it out of his own pocket, then sat at his desk cleaning his fingernails and listening to the steady clink of Trusdale's knife and fork on the china plate. When it stopped, he went in. Trusdale was sitting on his bunk. His plate was so clean Barclay figured he must have lapped up the last of the gravy like a dog. He was crying.

"Something just come to me," Trusdale said.

"What's that, Jim?"

"If they hang me tomorrow morning, I'll go into my grave with steak and eggs still in my belly. It won't have no chance to work through."

For a moment, Barclay said nothing. He was horrified not by the image but

because Trusdale had thought of it. Then he said, "Wipe your nose."

Trusdale wiped it.

"Now listen to me, Jim, because this is your last chance. You were in that bar in the middle of the afternoon. Not many people in there then. Isn't that right?"

"I guess it is."

"Then who took your hat? Close your eyes. Think back. See it."

Trusdale closed his eyes. Barclay waited. At last Trusdale opened his eyes, which were red from crying. "I can't even remember was I wearing it."

Barclay sighed. "Give me your plate, and mind that knife."

Trusdale handed the plate through the bars with the knife and fork laid on it, and said he wished he could have some beer. Barclay thought it over, then put on his heavy coat and Stetson and walked down to the Chuck-a-Luck, where he got a small pail of beer from Dale Gerard. Undertaker Hines was just finishing a glass of wine. He followed Barclay out.

"Big day tomorrow," Barclay said. "There hasn't been a hanging here in ten years, and with luck there won't be another for ten more. I'll be gone out of the job by then. I wish I was now."

Hines looked at him. "You really don't think he killed her."

"If he didn't," Barclay said, "whoever did is still walking around."

The hanging was at nine o'clock the next morning. The day was windy and bitterly cold, but most of the town turned out to watch. Pastor Ray Rowles stood on the scaffold next to John House. Both of them were shivering in spite of their coats and scarves. The pages of Pastor Rowles's Bible fluttered. Tucked into House's belt, also fluttering, was a hood of homespun cloth dyed black.

Barclay led Trusdale, his hands cuffed behind his back, to the gallows. Trusdale was all right until he got to the steps, then he began to buck and cry.

"Don't do this," he said. "Please don't do this to me. Please don't hurt me. Please don't kill me."

He was strong for a little man, and Barclay motioned Dave Fisher to come and lend a hand. Together they muscled Trusdale, twisting and ducking and pushing, up the twelve wooden steps. Once, he bucked so hard all three of them almost fell off, and arms reached up to catch them if they did.



"Quit that and die like a man!" someone shouted.

On the platform, Trusdale was momentarily quiet, but when Pastor Rowles commenced Psalm 51, he began to scream. "Like a woman with her tit caught in the wringer," someone said later in the Chuck-a-Luck.

"Have mercy on me, O God, after Thy great goodness," Rowles read, raising his voice to be heard above the condemned man's shrieks to be let off. "According to the multitude of Thy mercies, do away with mine offenses."

When Trusdale saw House take the black hood out of his belt, he began to pant like a dog. He shook his head from side to side, trying to dodge the hood. His hair flew. House followed each jerk patiently, like a man who means to bridle a skittish horse.

"Let me look at the mountains!" Trusdale bellowed. Runners of snot hung from his nostrils. "I'll be good if you let me look at the mountains one more time!"

But House only jammed the hood over Trusdale's head and pulled it down to his shaking shoulders. Pastor Rowles was droning on, and Trusdale tried to run off the trapdoor. Barclay and Fisher pushed him back onto it. Down below, someone cried, "Ride 'em, cowboy!"

"Say amen," Barclay told Pastor Rowles. "For Christ's sake, say amen."

"Amen," Pastor Rowles said, and stepped back, closing his Bible with a clap.

Barclay nodded to House. House pulled the lever. The greased beam retracted and the trap dropped. So did Trusdale. There was a crack when his neck broke. His legs drew up almost to his chin, then fell back limp. Yellow drops stained the snow under his feet.

"There, you bastard!" Rebecca Cline's father shouted. "Died pissing like a dog on a fireplug. Welcome to Hell." A few people clapped.

The spectators stayed until Trusdale's corpse, still wearing the black hood, was laid in the same hurry-up wagon he'd ridden to town in. Then they dispersed.

Barclay went back to the jail and sat in the cell Trusdale had occupied. He sat there for ten minutes. It was cold enough to see his breath. He knew what he was waiting for, and eventually it came. He picked up the small bucket



*"No, I don't want a glass of water, but I'm worried that I might want one."*

that had held Trusdale's last drink of beer and vomited. Then he went into his office and stoked up the stove.

He was still there eight hours later, trying to read a book, when Abel Hines came in. He said, "You need to come down to the funeral parlor, Otis. There's something I want to show you."

"What?"

"No. You'll want to see it for yourself."

They walked down to the Hines Funeral Parlor & Mortuary. In the back room, Trusdale lay naked on a cooling board. There was a smell of chemicals and shit.

"They load their pants when they die that way," Hines said. "Even men who go to it with their heads up. They can't help it. The sphincter lets go."

"And?"

"Step over here. I figure a man in your job has seen worse than a pair of shitty drawers."

They lay on the floor, mostly turned inside out. Something gleamed in the mess. Barclay leaned closer and saw it was a silver dollar. He reached down and plucked it from the crap.

"I don't understand it," Hines said. "Son of a bitch was locked up a good long time."

There was a chair in the corner. Barclay sat down on it so heavily he made a little *woof* sound. "He must have swallowed it the first time when he saw our

lanterns coming. And every time it came out he cleaned it off and swallowed it again."

The two men stared at each other.

"You believed him," Hines said at last.

"Fool that I am, I did."

"Maybe that says more about you than it does about him."

"He went on saying he was innocent right to the end. He'll most likely stand at the throne of God saying the same thing."

"Yes," Hines said.

"I don't understand. He was going to hang. Either way, he was going to hang. Do you understand it?"

"I don't even understand why the sun comes up. What are you going to do with that cartwheel? Give it back to the girl's mother and father? It might be better if you didn't, because..." Hines shrugged.

Because the Clines knew all along. Everyone in town knew all along. He was the only one who hadn't known. Fool that he was.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with it," he said.

The wind gusted, bringing the sound of singing. It was coming from the church. It was the Doxology. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Stephen King on "A Death."

# THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## UNITED BLOOD

*How hardcore conquered New York.*

BY KELEFA SANNEH

When John Joseph returned to New York, in 1981, punk rock was almost dead, and he was determined to help kill it. He had grown up hard in Queens, abandoned by his father and then by his mother. (Eventually, he stopped using his last name, which was McGowan.) He wound up living in a Catholic boys' home in the Rockaways, which in time came to seem less appealing than a life on the streets. Among the many things he found on the streets was punk, in the form of a wild concert at Max's Kansas City, the night club on Park Avenue South where such heroes as Sid Vicious and Johnny Thunders liked to debauch themselves. John Joseph had visited Max's under the influence of a sedative called Placidyl, which may explain why he can't remember what band was playing, and why he fared so poorly in the fistfight that followed the show. But he liked the mayhem, and he liked the punk-obsessed woman he met a few weeks later, who had a fake English accent and a real heroin addiction.

In his autobiography, "The Evolution of a Cro-Magnon," John Joseph remembers that he fled New York to join the Navy, then fled the Navy for Washington, D.C. There he discovered something even better than punk. Washington was one of the first cities to embrace a faster, meaner genre called hardcore—an offshoot of punk that was also, in its way, a stern refutation of it. To hardcore kids like John Joseph, early-eighties New York, with

its glamorous junkies and its flamboyant icons, seemed stuck in the past. "We'd get in the fucking cars, go to New York, and wreak havoc," he told Steven Blush, a historian of hardcore. "People didn't even know how to stage-dive." Instead of flinging themselves off the stage and forming violent "pits," New Yorkers pogoed, springing around the dance floor in a punk-rock ritual that he now found contemptibly quaint.

Hardcore was born as a double-negative genre: a rebellion against a rebellion. The early punks were convinced that rock and roll had gone wrong and were resolved to put it right, deflating arena-rock pretension with crude songs and rude attitudes. Legs McNeil, the New York fanzine editor who helped coin the term "punk," saw the movement as a rejection of "lame hippie stuff" and other symptoms of cultural exhaustion. But when punk, too, came to seem lame, the hardcore kids arrived, eager to show up their elders. The idea was to out-punk the punks, thereby recapturing the wild promise of the genre, with its tantalizing suggestion that rock music should be something more than mere entertainment—that it should, somehow, pose a threat to mainstream culture.

In those early years, hardcore had a few flagship cities, none of which were New York. Los Angeles was home to a scabrous and squaly band called Black Flag, whose concerts were frequently raided by riot police. And, in



ABOVE: FRANÇOIS AVRIL; OPPOSITE: FRANK WHITE

*When punk seemed exhausted, a new generation*





*of kids arrived in the East Village to fight for their music. One band member recalls, "We were like these crazy fucking street rats."*



Washington, John Joseph and his peers were electrified by a group of Rastafarians called Bad Brains, who played with such eerie conviction that they seemed to be vibrating. Bad Brains crystallized the movement with a 1980 single called “Pay to Cum,” which buzzed along for ninety seconds at about three hundred beats per minute—nearly twice the tempo of an average song by the New York punk band the Ramones, who had previously been considered plenty fast.

Unlike punk, with its half-spurious British accent, hardcore was American from the beginning, which may be one reason that it was slower to conquer a territory as un-American as New York. But by 1981, when John Joseph ran out of couches to sleep on in Washington, the city was coming around. Bad Brains had recently settled there, arriving in time to play at the last-ever Max’s Kansas City concert; the opening act was an upstart local group called the Beastie Boys. John Joseph served for a time as a Bad Brains roadie and eventually became the lead singer of a fearsome band called Cro-Mags, which helped transform New York hardcore from a side-show to the main event. By the end of the decade, the city had the most

fertile scene in the country, and probably the most loathed.

Now comes a book that seeks to document how, exactly, this transformation came to pass. “NYHC: New York Hardcore 1980-1990” (Bazillion Points) is an oral history of the movement, compiled by Tony Rettman, a journalist who eagerly followed its development from across the Hudson River, in New Jersey. It is a fittingly bare-bones book, with fifty-two short chapters and no editorializing from the author. But the story it tells is not a simple one: this was, to quote the title of Cro-Mags’ first album, an “age of quarrel,” which means that any celebration of those not wholly good old days will necessarily involve a certain amount of argument. New York hardcore was regularly (and, often, fairly) criticized for its thuggery, its bigotry, its idiocy. Yet the scene also produced some singularly incandescent music. Its tough-guy ethos found expression in a correspondingly tough sound, one that expanded the musical possibilities of punk by emphasizing rhythm over noise. The lyrics tended to be pithy and declarative, like rallying cries, but vague enough so that fans could adapt them to their own struggles, real or imagined. The best New York hard-

core records sound as urgent as any rock music ever made.

The music was well matched to a city defined by its conflicts. And for the bands and the fans the willingness to fight took on an almost mystical importance: it was proof, in a circular way, that they were doing something worth fighting for. As one musician remembers, a concert was a “proving ground,” even if the only thing being proved was that the locals wouldn’t let out-of-towners push them around in the pit. For most of the people who loved hardcore, the music was inseparable from the scene that created it, and from the turbulent shows that brought participants together. As a consequence, Rettman’s sources have strikingly little to say about music. Palm-muting, the guitar technique used to create the distinctive New York hardcore chug, is mentioned only once, and by an outsider—a member of the metal band Anthrax. Dito Montiel, a guitarist for the band Major Conflict (and now a film director), tells Rettman that he didn’t think of himself as a musician. “In all honesty, I didn’t really like playing music,” he says. “I just liked the chaos. I just loved being there.”

By the time Max’s closed, the New York hardcore scene had moved farther downtown, to the East Village, which was full of dilapidated buildings that could be claimed by whoever had the nerve. There were two storefronts on Avenue A where band members could hang out and play shows. Some of the hardcore kids squatted in abandoned apartments nearby, and virtually all of them cultivated a street-wise sensibility. A number of them shaved their scalps as a show of kinship with skinheads, the working-class British hell-raisers who considered themselves braver and brawnier than punks.

In 1983, a seven-inch vinyl record appeared called “United Blood E.P.,” by Agnostic Front, which was gaining a reputation as the fiercest band in the city. On the cover, four skinheads played to about twice as many people; on the back, there was a drawing of a skinhead carrying a “New York Hardcore” flag, alongside a list of ten songs,



which were over in about six minutes. The startling power of the music derived partly from its inelegance: poky, sullen introductions led to off-kilter paroxysms, as the drummer frantically tried to keep pace with the hoarse singer, Roger Miret. By stripping all the glamour and the sex from what was, nominally, rock and roll, the record made even other hardcore bands sound fussy and tame. The songs had the single-minded urgency of political protest, but with the politics scooped out. While some New York bands railed against President Reagan, Agnostic Front expressed frustration and menace through lyrics that were as gnomic as its name:

Talk about unity  
Then talk about conformity  
You don't want to support the scene  
Why don't you get the fuck away from me?

The band was led by its guitarist, a self-described “goombah” from Little Italy known as Vinnie Stigma, who recruited bandmates as if he were building a not very well-regulated militia. “I didn’t get you in Agnostic Front because you were a good musician,” Stigma tells Rettman. “I got you in the band because you were part of the scene and I seen you in the pit.” This focus on micro-politics, on scene citizenship, was central to hardcore, and to its double-negative identity. If the punks were antisocial, the hardcore kids would be, somehow, anti-antisocial, promoting a kind of scowling solidarity—equal parts “unity” and “get the fuck away from me.”

Stigma and his militiamen were the battle-hardened elders of the scene; Cro-Mags were the feral youth. John Joseph had been inducted into the band by a precocious troublemaker named Harley Flanagan, an East Village native who had undergone a kind of inverted maturation from hipster to hooligan. When Flanagan was nine, he published a book of poems with an introduction by Allen Ginsberg, a family friend; by twelve, he was the drummer for a band called the Stimulators. On a trip to Northern Ireland, Flanagan submitted to a ritual head shaving, and upon his return he proved himself worthy of his haircut. “Harley always had interesting weapons,”

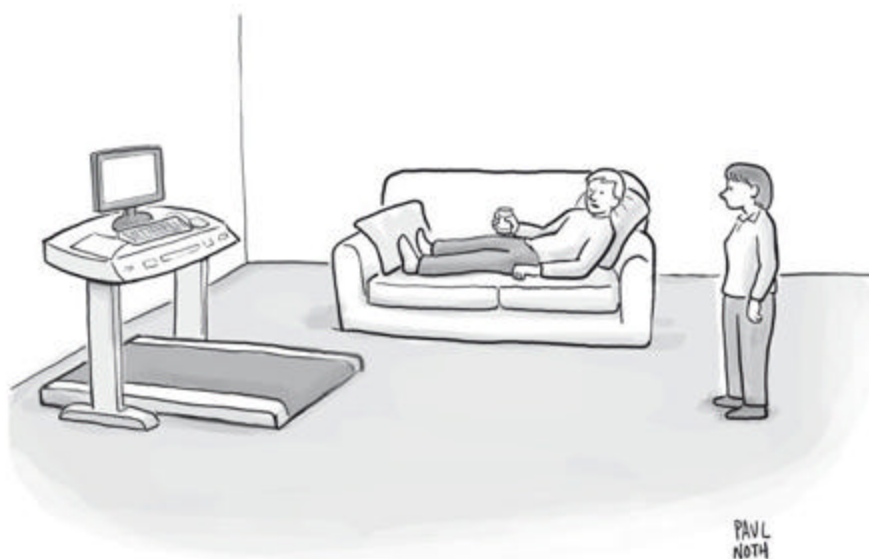
one friend remembers, fondly. “It was always an eight ball in a sock, or a padlock in a handkerchief, or a table leg.” In descriptions like this, the hardcore kids seem less like pioneers and more like relics: the last of a long line of sturdy working-class white guys who prowled the city streets, armed with whatever tools of combat they could find.

It turned out that Flanagan was nearly as proficient with a bass guitar. Cro-Mags released an influential demo tape in 1985, which was defter than Agnostic Front’s debut but no less menacing. Hardcore was slowing down, following the lead of Bad Brains, who increasingly reinforced their frenetic songs with off-speed passages known as “mosh” parts. (The word may have derived from the Jamaican term “mash up,” meaning “destroy”—a rough analogue of “kill,” in the show-business sense.) There turned out to be an inverse relationship between the speed of the music and the activity in the crowd: when a band suddenly cut the tempo in half, the pit would become twice as frenetic, as slam-dancers used the space between beats to wind up for maximum impact.

“The Age of Quarrel” appeared in 1986, with a title derived, as many listeners probably didn’t know, from the Sanskrit term *kali yuga*, which refers to a time of strife said to have begun about five thousand years ago. John Joseph had fallen in with the Hare

Krishna movement, and, as a consequence, the lyrics he delivered were faintly spiritual (he urged listeners to embark on “the path of righteousness”), though firmly anti-idealistic: one refrain was “World peace! Can’t be! Done!” There was a hint of melody in the way he shouted, and the band fortified its hardcore aggression with rock-and-roll swagger, as if the spirit of AC/DC had been transported to an East Village squat.

The New York scene was never monolithic. Shows drew skinheads, punks, and plenty of average-looking young people in T-shirts; many of the fans who followed Agnostic Front also turned out for False Prophets, a sarcastic and theatrical punk-inspired band. Even so, many scene participants nursed an inferiority complex. The Manhattanites disdained the guys from Queens; the Long Islanders hated being thought of as “interlopers”; virtually everyone resented the scenes in other cities, where the band members seemed to have enough spare time and cash to tour and promote themselves. “The kids from New York, we were like these crazy fucking street rats,” Todd Youth, who played guitar for a band called Murphy’s Law, says. “The kids from Boston and D.C. were really well off.” While most other early-eighties scenes gave rise to influential independent record labels, New York’s generated war stories. “You were getting chased down the street by gangs of Puerto Ricans



*“It’s great for multicrastinating.”*

that wanted to fucking kill you,” Youth remembers; Avenue A was contested turf. Alex Kinon, who played with Agnostic Front, says that he was once shot at in Tompkins Square Park, and that Vinnie Stigma responded by rushing toward the gunfire, armed with only an improvised shield in the form of a garbage-can lid.

When “United Blood” was released, the critic Jeff Bale gave it a rave review in *Maximum Rocknroll*, a smudgy Bay Area fanzine that was the punk publication of record. “I can’t really tell what the hell they’re talking about,” he wrote, “but this EP is downright nasty.” The zine’s editor, Tim Yohannan, was less impressed. Yohannan viewed punk as a vector for progressive politics, and he had been hearing alarming reports about ugly behavior in New York—a member of False Prophets warned him that, too often, being “hardcore” in New York meant being “a fag-bashing, swastika-scrawling cretin.” Yohannan printed a letter from an anonymous correspondent who blamed one band in particular: “Agnazi Front.” And he informed readers that the New York scene was being destroyed by “a Nazi-chic trend that recently manifested itself in a skin-Puerto Rican race war.”

The old punks had deployed Nazi imagery as a kind of prank (Sid Vicious and Johnny Thunders liked to wear swastikas), but some hardcore bands took a more unsettling approach. The first Agnostic Front album featured on its cover a 1941 photograph known as “The Last Jew of Vinnitsa,” which shows a German officer putting a gun to the head of a man kneeling over an open grave. The album included an unambiguous anti-Fascist statement (“It’s time to grow out of your Nazi hypocrisy!”), but most of the lyrics were politically indeterminate, and some fans chose to focus, instead, on lines like “They hate us/We’ll hate them.” In Rettman’s book, a fanzine editor who moved to the city from Iowa remembers being fascinated by the “Nazi imagery” on his Agnostic Front album cover—to him, it expressed the band’s intimidating “New York City attitude,” which was part of the appeal. Agnostic Front all but

dared listeners to assume the worst, and Yohannan wasn’t the only one who did: Agnostic Front shows attracted a certain number of white-power partisans, and the band occasionally had to pause, mid-set, to censure an audience member for Sieg-Heiling in the pit.

In an attempt to address the controversy, the band’s members submitted to a group interview with *Maximum Rocknroll*. Their answers weren’t



very reassuring. They abjured racism, saying, “We have no qualms about anyone who is a decent human being.” But they also mentioned the difficulty of living on the Lower East Side, alongside “Puerto Ricans and their drug dealers.” (If they had been in a more reconciliatory mood, they might have mentioned that Miret, their lead singer, was a Cuban immigrant.) And when the interviewer asked about the phenomenon of anti-gay violence they pleaded neither innocent nor guilty:

Fag-bashing is a thing of the past. At one time, there was a small minority that indulged in violence against the helpless, either out of boredom or the need for power. It was not a major part of the bands or the scene. In fact, only a few people did it and it didn’t last very long, only occasionally on and off.

In “American Hardcore,” a contentious but invaluable history of the genre, Steven Blush concludes that “all the big NYHC skinheads perpetrated vicious fag-bashing sprees.” In an online interview from 2006, Flanagan conceded that he had done things that were “wrong,” partly because he was dismayed by the “gentrifying” East Village. “I used to beat up all the artsyfartsy faggots,” he said. “But it wasn’t because they were gay, it wasn’t because they were arty. It was because I felt that I’d earned my way into that fuckin neighborhood, and I wasn’t just

gonna fuckin roll over and just let this neighborhood disappear.”

Like many punk-influenced bands, Agnostic Front and Cro-Mags had an instinctive revulsion toward mainstream politics. But they didn’t have a replacement; what they had was a bundle of repudiations and provocations and half-formed grievances. In depicting New York as a battleground, they encouraged a tribal solidarity that sometimes bled into racial solidarity. New York hardcore was a largely white movement based in a largely non-white neighborhood, which means that hardcore pride could be difficult to disentangle from white pride. (Bad Brains was an exception, and a complicated one: John Joseph says that he fell out with the band members because they wouldn’t stop playing Louis Farrakhan speeches in their tour van.) Some musicians suggested that there was, or should be, a difference between “white pride” and “white power.” And in the *Maximum Rocknroll* interview the members of Agnostic Front argued that working-class whites should be no more “ashamed” of their identity than “blacks and Hispanics”—two minorities, they added, that “occupy most of our prison spaces.”

The complicated logic of anti-antisocial behavior also meant that, even as these bands were presenting themselves as more extreme than the punks, they simultaneously sought to appear more American, more conservative—part of a backlash against big-city liberalism. Agnostic Front used a logo showing a pair of combat boots over an American flag, and recorded a song called “Public Assistance,” which translated Ronald Reagan’s warnings about welfare fraud into more inflammatory language: “How come it’s minorities who cry, ‘Things are too tough?’/On TV with their gold chains, claim they don’t have enough.” When Yohannan got his chance to interrogate the members of Agnostic Front, he asked about a rumor that their van had a Reagan bumper sticker on it. (They told him it had come with the vehicle.) In certain punk circles, an accusation of Republicanism was just as shocking as an accusation of Nazism; either tendency was liable to



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be described as “fascist” in the pages of *Maximum Rocknroll*. Perhaps the members of Murphy’s Law had this in mind when they recorded “California Pipeline,” a bratty hardcore song guaranteed to horrify Yohannan and his allies. The chorus went, “I’m a rad Republican/I’m proud to be an American.”

The first wave of New York hardcore didn’t last long. Many of the East Village squats and clubhouses were shut down, and some concerts moved to CBGB, the old punk club, which realized that it could bring in extra income with all-ages hardcore shows in the afternoons. Of those early bands, the only one to find huge success was the Beastie Boys, who in the course of a few years evolved into one of the most popular hip-hop groups of all time. Agnostic Front’s second album was a polarizing experiment, fusing hardcore with the cleaner, brighter sound of thrash metal. And Cro-Mags never recorded another album with the “Age of Quarrel” lineup. (In 2012, after Flanagan was ejected from the band, he turned up at a reunion show and stabbed two people. He claimed later that he was ambushed, and charges against him were dropped.)

What happened in the late nineteen-eighties was both vindicating and embarrassing for the rough-and-tumble kids who created New York hardcore: the scene was revived by the suburbs. Sixty miles north, in Danbury, Connecticut, a teen-ager named Ray Cappel joined with a high-school classmate to create Revelation Records, a label that nurtured a new generation of New York hardcore. (This was precisely the kind of sustaining institution that the pioneers—the street rats—had never managed to build.) Cappel was devoted to “straight edge,” an anti-drug philosophy that originated in the early-eighties Washington scene. He formed a band called Youth of Today, which aimed at evoking the sound of first-wave hardcore, while transforming the New York scene into a site for moral uplift. Thanks largely to Cappel, the city became the unlikely home of a new straight-edge movement, known as “the youth crew,” after one of his songs. The genre had entered its self-conscious phase: since

then, every hardcore band has been, in some sense, retro.

Cappel was close-shaved, but he wasn’t a skinhead. The youth crew he led favored what one band member calls “suburban imported fashion”: Nikes, hooded Champion sweatshirts, varsity jackets. (This, too, was a way to be anti-antisocial, especially at a club like CBGB, where everyone else was wearing a black leather coat.) Like the earlier version of New York hardcore, this one was unapologetically male-dominated. Wendy Eager, who edited a fanzine called *Guillotine*, tells Rettman that she found the new scene less hospitable than the old one, which, for all its vexations, had felt like home to her. “The whole youth crew ostracized women from hardcore,” she says. “They wanted to be these jock guys who got into the pit.” Indeed, slam dancing had been transformed into something that looked suspiciously athletic, with windmilling arms, jumping kicks, and acrobatic flips from the stage into the crowd. Although the bands were committed in theory to “positive” thoughts and actions, they maintained the martial spirit of their predecessors: Cappel sang about the importance of “standing hard,” which some fans viewed as license to fight when necessary, and sometimes when not.

Rettman’s book spends relatively little time discussing the rise of the youth crew, and for good reason: the levelheaded revivalists produced some great records, but not as many great stories. (As far as we know, Cappel never attempted to stop a bullet with a garbage-can lid.) Instead, these clean-cut young men found a new way to be hardcore. One of the best bands was Gorilla Biscuits, from Queens, whose lyrics were plainspoken and disarmingly personal. One song, “Things We Say,” was about how thoughtless remarks can hurt people’s feelings:

I think I was an asshole when I said what  
I said  
It’s just a sick sense of humor rolls  
around in my head  
‘Cause we’ve had our fun at your  
expense  
And that’s wrong—and we know it!

It was an unlikely topic for a great hardcore song. But perhaps its startling



niceness was the ultimate affront to all the punks and skinheads who tried so hard to be nasty.

For all their bravura, most hardcore bands didn't set out to change the world, and the people in Rettman's book decline to make any grand claims on behalf of the scene they love, except to say that it endured. In the nineties, Sick of It All, from Queens, became perhaps the most popular New York hardcore band of all, despite adding little to the scene's rich treasury of war stories. "Everybody in Sick of It All came from good families," one member tells Rettman. "But that scene just before us, that was hardcore. They all had mental problems and they all lived in the street." New York hardcore also cross-pollinated with metal and hip-hop, sending its influence far beyond the East Village. As the nineteen-nineties began, Revelation released a record by Inside Out, a seething California band whose singer, Zack de la Rocha, went on to codify rap-rock as the leader of Rage Against the Machine.

Hardcore endured, too, as an ideal, and a cultural strategy. Most of all, being hardcore means turning inward, ignoring broader society in order to create a narrower one. In that narrower society, one's ideological convictions can matter less than conviction itself—a sense, however vague, of shared purpose. In the New York hardcore scene, a wide range of characters—from Rastafarians to Republicans, street rats to suburbanites—came to see themselves as part of the same movement. That flexible spirit lives on in the genre's famous suffix, which is now used to tag an array of movements, not all of them musical: rapcore, metalcore, grindcore, nerdcore, mumblecore, normcore.

Brendan Yates, the lead singer of an emerging band called Turnstile, remembers the first time he heard hardcore, in the early aughts. He was ten or eleven, growing up in a small Maryland town, when a friend took him skateboarding and played him a latter-day New York hardcore band called Madball. (Madball is part of the Agnostic Front family, literally: the lead singer is Roger Miret's younger half-brother.) Yates said, "What is this? It sounds scary." A friend made him a mix of Madball songs, which also included some songs by Ag-

nostic Front, and he loved it. Now all he had to do was figure out what, exactly, he was hearing. "I didn't realize that punk and hardcore were a community," Yates says, and, as friends sent him links to recordings, he tried to piece together the music's history. "I'd be, like, 'O.K., what's this band?'" he says. "'What time period is this? Is this eighties? Nineties? Current?'"

Turnstile is helping lead the latest revival of the New York hardcore sound. But when the band's debut album, "Nonstop Feeling," appeared, earlier this year, it sounded like nothing you might have heard on Avenue A in 1983. Propulsive mosh parts occasionally give way to melancholy guitar interludes, and there is even a memorable and tuneful love song, although it lasts less than eighty seconds. One song lyric mentions "some two-faced girl," which sounds startlingly spiteful—until Yates slyly balances it, in the next verse, with a line about "some two-faced boy," who might even be him.

Yates likes to encourage audience members to stage-dive, to slam-dance, and to borrow his microphone if they want to help him shout: these old hardcore moves work as well as they ever did, even though Yates is a cheerful presence onstage, not at all menacing. The old hardcore bands made it easy for people to forget they were musicians: the biggest fans and the biggest detractors of Agnostic Front shared a willingness to view the group primarily as a social movement, something to rally behind or rally against. By contrast, "Nonstop Feeling" won't be anybody's cause. But it may well attract a new group of converts; a charming music video, co-starring a young boy and a small dog, has drawn nearly a hundred and fifty thousand views. And the album may help some listeners, old and young, to understand how a seemingly dead-end genre has endured so long. No matter how heavy or hard the mosh parts get, Turnstile never pretends to be anything other than a bunch of young men blowing off steam. Hearing them now, you're tempted to wonder whether that's all hardcore ever really was. ♦

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A conversation with Kelefa Sanneh.

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## RAPT

*Grieving with your goshawk.*

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



The boys have gone out hawking. The year is 500 A.D., give or take, when young men of a certain social class fly hawks for sport. One of these boys belongs to that class: his father is a knight, and he will grow up to be one, too. His name is Kay. The other boy will grow up to be a king, but he doesn't know that yet. For now, he is Kay's inferior: younger, adopted, of unknown lineage, saddled by the older child with the unfortunate nickname the Wart. At present, in an arrangement that is typical, the Wart is trudging along carrying a dead creature to serve as a lure, while Kay, walking in front of him, carries the hawk.

It is a goshawk, a huge bird with golden eyes, like something out of a legend. And this one is: we are six pages into T. H. White's six-hundred-and-forty-page medieval epic, "The Once and Future King." We have already learned, on page 1, that the boys practice hawking every week, but now it becomes clear that Kay is bad at it. He throws the bird from his glove before it is ready, and for a moment it hangs there, a confusion of feathers and air and instinct. An instant later, it is lost. "Up went the hawk," White writes, "swooping like a child flung high in a swing, until the wings folded and he was sitting in a tree."

*Haunted by her father's death, Helen Macdonald kept company with a bird of prey.*

Kay soon goes off in a fit of pique, leaving the mild, anxious, loyal Wart to try to catch the bird. It flies deeper and deeper into the woods. Night falls. The Wart worries. He knows the forest is full of outlaws, maniacs, and wild beasts, but he can't bring himself to abandon the hawk. He keeps watch beneath the tree where it roosts, gets shot at, flees, loses the bird, encounters a knight, loses him, too, then stumbles upon a clearing with a stone cottage and a strange old man outside. The old man is Merlyn, the magician, and he foresaw long ago that this would happen: that here, in front of his cottage, he would meet the boy known in later years and ever after as King Arthur. So much has yet to come, but all of it—the sword, the stone, the wars, the Round Table, the quests, the love affairs, the murders, the betrayals, the tragedy, the whole huge arc of it like a longbow pulled fast with the arrow already nocked—all of it begins because a person, of uncertain identity and gravely lost, binds his fate to a goshawk.

Helen Macdonald was in her third and final year as a research fellow at Cambridge, a prestigious postgraduate position, when her father died and, for eight hundred pounds sterling, she acquired a ten-week-old goshawk. The death was unexpected. Her father, a professional photographer based in London, had gone out after a violent storm to take pictures of the damage down at Battersea, when he suffered a heart attack. Later, Macdonald saw the final image in his camera: "Blurred, taken from a low angle, far too low; an empty London street."

The goshawk was unexpected, too. By the time of her father's death, Macdonald, an experienced falconer, had trained kestrels and merlins and peregrines, but she had never cared to train a goshawk. Among those who know their birds of prey, the reputation of the goshawk is half Hamlet, half Lady Macbeth: mad, murderous, unpredictable, the kind of creature whose partners and intimates should brace themselves for trouble. "Spooky, pale-eyed psychopaths," Macdonald calls them. "Not for me, I'd thought, many times." But then came death,



that other unpredictable mad murderer, and Macdonald got a hawk, named her Mabel, and set about trying to tame her.

Macdonald's book about that experience, "H Is for Hawk" (Grove), was first published last summer in Great Britain, where it won the Samuel Johnson Prize for nonfiction and the Costa Book of the Year prize, awarded to the best new book in any genre. Had there been an award for the best new book that defies every genre, I imagine it would have won that, too. Like the griffin that the Wart might have met in his forest, "H Is for Hawk" is an improbable and hybrid creature. It is one part grief memoir, one part guide to raptors, and one part biography of T. H. White, who chronicled his maiden effort at falconry in "The Goshawk," written just before he began work on "The Once and Future King." I am describing Macdonald's book by its parts for the same reason we describe a griffin by its parts—because how else would we do so? But it is coherent, complete, and riveting, perhaps the finest nonfiction I read in the past year.

To this wondrously atypical book, Macdonald brings an equally atypical background. She is a former falcon-breeder for royalty of the United Arab Emirates, a current historian of science at Cambridge, a naturalist, an illustrator, and the author of three collections of poetry and one previous work of nonfiction, "Falcon," a natural and cultural history. She is also what you might call a former raptor prodigy. Her father, in addition to being a photographer, was an amateur plane-spotter, and he taught his young daughter sky-watching, bird-watching, and patience. By the age of six, she had begun teaching herself about birds of prey. Her prepubescent leisure reading included, along with "The Goshawk," Gilbert Blaine's "Falconry," Frank Illingworth's "Falcons and Falconry," and James Harting's "Hints on Hawks." By nine or ten, Macdonald had become, in her words, "the most appalling falconry bore."

Listen to her now, two pages in:

Maybe you've glanced out of the window and seen there, on the lawn, a bloody great hawk murdering a pigeon, or a black-

bird, or a magpie, and it looks the hugest, most impressive piece of wildness you've ever seen, like someone's tipped a snow leopard into your kitchen and you find it eating the cat.

So much for the falconry bore. Intellectually, Macdonald is unhurried—she pauses to point out whatever is interesting—but, stylistically, she is like this passage, all pounce. Over and over, her writing takes you by surprise: no sooner have you registered the kitchen than, whoa, there's the snow leopard, its huge Himalayan paws leaving prints on the tile and half a domestic shorthair hanging from its mouth. I will never again not have pictured that, and, with apologies to my cat, I am glad. Like "The Goshawk," only with considerably more self-awareness, "H Is for Hawk" is about what happens when you blur the line between wild and domestic: about what it is like to share your home with a bloody great murdering creature, why anyone would choose to do so, and what rewards and hazards attend that decision.

Books about nature, like the category "animal," sometimes suffer from a sin of omission: in both cases, people belong inside them but are often left out. Books about grief run the opposite risk; too much of the person can be left in, too much of the world omitted. Macdonald, who is writing both kinds of book at once, makes neither mistake. She is intimate and moving on the anguish that carried her into the company of hawks, but the world of her book is like the world we really live in, crowded with humans and human ideas, and she turns on it all the triple perspicacity of a poet, a naturalist, and a historian. She dissects the cultural symbolism attached to hawks from Victorian England to the Third Reich; she catalogues the classic animal stories by gay authors, who could not write openly of their human relationships; she observes that when a species is endangered it suffers not only numeric but also semantic decline. "The rarer they get, the fewer meanings animals can have," she observes. "Eventually rarity is all they are made of."

Goshawks are rare in England

now—certainly, they are a rare companion for a young urban woman—but, Macdonald notes, there was a time when you could walk down the street in Cambridge and see as many birds on the fist as today you see dogs on a leash. That world had an entire culture and language, and Macdonald provides an introduction to it. A person who trains falcons is called a falconer, but a person who trains hawks is called an austringer. Young hawks are eyasses, as crossword-puzzle devotees know; adolescents are passagers; those caught as adults are haggards. A happy hawk signals its contentment by "rousing," and Macdonald and White each provide a wonderful description. Mabel "lifts herself into a vast, frothy mop of feathers"; White's hawk, when it roused, "looked exactly like a fir-cone." By contrast, a malcontented hawk will "bate," dive-bombing off its owner's fist in terror or rage. A hawk cannot escape by bathing, because its owner holds its jesses—slim leather straps attached to bands the bird wears on its ankles. But it can escape when released to hunt, as Kay's hawk did—and then, like the Wart, the owner must follow underneath the bird and try to coax it down. Austringers spend so much time craning their necks at fugitive hawks that, Macdonald informs us, one seventeenth-century writer declared falconry to be a moral activity on the ground that it kept you looking toward Heaven.

Macdonald delights in the argot of falconry, so ancient and exclusive that it feels like the words Merlyn might have used in his spells. But she relishes, too, the matter-of-fact magic of avian biology. Certain birds can perceive ultraviolet colors, the separate wing beats of a bee, and the earth's magnetic field, and goshawks, Macdonald tells us, can "watch thermals of warm air rise, roil, and spill into clouds." She also notes that the bird's volatile reputation is partly due to neurology: the pathways between the goshawk's sensory neurons and its motor neurons all but bypass the brain. "They react to stimuli literally without thinking," Macdonald writes, and a whole lot of those stimuli can provoke their hunting instinct: squeaky

doors, passing bicycles, real pheasants, but also black-and-white drawings of them, Joan Sutherland on the radio. ("I laughed out loud at that," Macdonald writes. "Stimulus: *opera*. Response: *kill*.") The other part of the goshawk's bad reputation, Macdonald points out, comes down to class bias. Goshawks hunt well in woods and require very little room to kill, whereas falcons need the kind of open space that, historically, was available only to those who owned manors. People who could afford to keep falcons looked down on those who couldn't—and, by extension, on the birds they kept instead.

That helps explain why Mabel fails to live up to her fearsome reputation. A character in the book in her own right, she does not come across as a psychopath; she comes across as a mixture of a Labrador retriever, an F-16, and Houdini. Chasing a rabbit that turns and runs into the woods, she "slewed round sling-shot style, heel-bow, soaking up g-force like a sponge," then "closed her wings and was gone." But at home she is companionable, curious, easy to train, and, to Macdonald's astonishment, play-

ful. The two of them play catch with crumpled pieces of paper and peekaboo through a rolled-up magazine. "No one had ever told me goshawks played," Macdonald writes. "I wondered if it was because no one had ever played with them. The thought made me terribly sad."

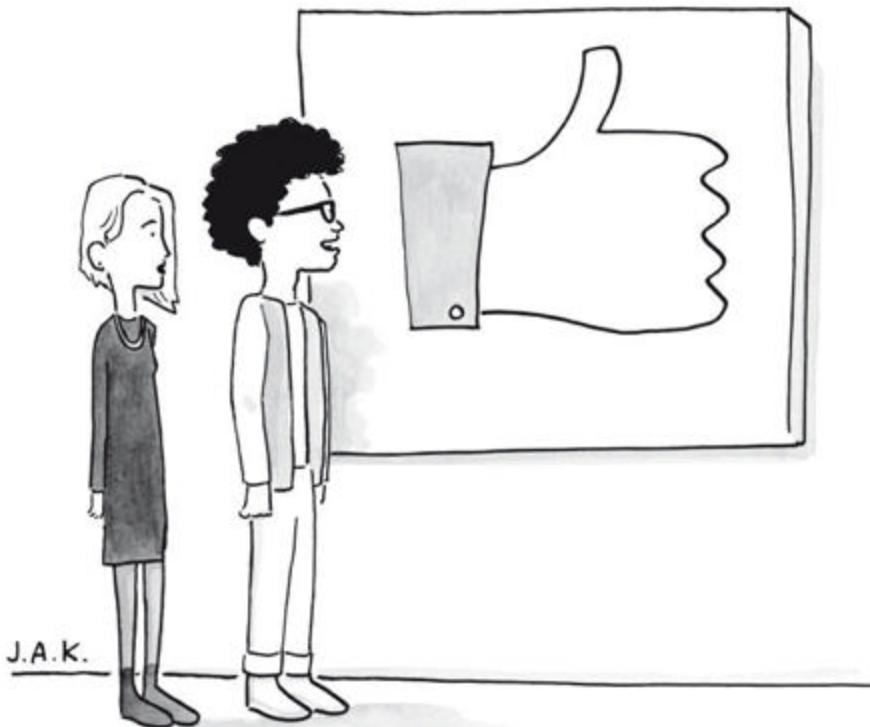
But Macdonald was already terribly sad; she was, in fact, far more troubled and difficult than her bird. Macdonald had always been close to her father, who emerges in the book as a kind, steady, understated man with a sly streak. "My dad had been my dad," she writes, "but also my friend, and a partner in crime": her companion in the kind of legal but impish adventures to which a professional photographer and a poet-falconer might incline. It seems a lovely relationship, and Macdonald writes with clarity and heart about its loss. She understands grief's paradoxical essence, which is the constant presence of absence; there is an awful moment in the book when, unable to remember a detail of a story about her father that she plans to tell at his memorial service, she picks up the phone to call him. Months after his death, she looks

around at the woods, at her hawk, at her life, and feels nothing, or nothing good: "My heart is salt."

Such simplicity, such totality. But what Macdonald handles so well on the page nearly undid her in real life. At the time of her father's death, she had "no partner, no children, no home. No nine-to-five job either." Like a tent poorly staked, she is filled by the storm that is grief and blown away. Soon that disconnection comes to seem desirable. Hurt by the human world, she wants nothing more to do with it. Instead, she longs to be like her bird: "solitary, self-possessed, free from grief."

Thus does hawking, as Macdonald practices it in her bereavement, become a zero-sum game: as the bird grows tamer, she grows wilder. She spends her days stalking with Mabel through field and forest, her pockets full of dead day-old chicks, snapping the necks of rabbits the bird would otherwise eat alive. She stops seeing friends, "jumped in panic when the postman knocked on the door; recoiled from the ringing phone." She lives alone in a house empty of coffee and filled with lumps of raw meat. Before long, she is walking that fine Lear line between grief and insanity. Wounded by death, she devotes herself to a pastime for which she must kill daily. Drowning in loss, she commits herself to a creature whose defining trait is the capacity to fly away.

The term "hoodwinked" is closely associated with falconry. For millennia, falconers have slipped hoods over the heads of their birds, calming their hair-trigger nervous systems by protecting them from excess exposure to the world. It is a morally muddied practice, simultaneously necessary, compassionate, and deceptive. Macdonald, in her grief, accomplishes the unlikely act of hoodwinking herself with a hawk. With Mabel on her fist, she is focussed and calm; without her, she is angry, reactive, and scared. Rather than assuaging her heartache, she is simply evading it, soothing herself by hiding from the world. Eventually, she recognizes the limitations of that strategy—because she is emotionally astute, but also because, back



*"I don't know art, but I know what I like."*



in her hawk-obsessed childhood, she had read about someone else who tried it.

Terence Hanbury White also got a goshawk to fill the void left by a beloved parent, but in a different sense: he never had one. His mother and father hated each other and, on the evidence, despised their son as well. White was beaten often, coddled rarely—when it was tactically convenient for one parent or the other—and otherwise neglected or humiliated. He finally went away to boarding school, but an upbringing like his did not permit complete escape, then or ever. Macdonald shares a telling detail: upon receiving a photograph of the young White, his mother wrote back to say that his lips were “growing sensual” and that he should hold them in—with his teeth, if need be. “It is so fatally easy,” White wrote of Lancelot in “The Once and Future King,” “to make young children believe that they are horrible.”

White did believe he was horrible. “I had a friend who was a sadistic homosexual, now happily married with children,” he once wrote to L. J. Potts, his former Cambridge tutor, in a minor classic of the genre of Asking for a Friend. White was himself a sadistic homosexual, and, in those pre-Stonewall, pre-“Fifty Shades” days, his desires were a misery to him. They were also, as far as anyone can tell, unfulfilled. White had no known male lovers, and he was, if anything, gentler than the standards of his time. In his twenties, he taught English at private boys’ schools, and, unlike most of his colleagues, refused to hit his pupils—partly out of conviction (he deplored the notion that “the complex psychology of a human being can be taught with a stick”), but possibly also because of how much he longed to do so. “He felt in his heart cruelty and cowardice,” White wrote, again of Lancelot, “the things which made him brave and kind.”

White was thirty when he quit teaching, rented a cabin far from town, and got a goshawk. He wanted to spend his time writing, but he also

had a deeper motive. “The business of life,” he wrote, was “to divest oneself of unnecessary possessions, and mainly of other people.” Like Macdonald, although more deliberately, he used the bird to engineer a retreat from the world. The day it arrived, White dined with friends, and then was “glad to shake off with them the last of an old human life.” His new life would be with and for the goshawk alone.

The poor bird; the poor man. The only worthy thing to come out of their relationship was “The Goshawk”—and that very nearly didn’t come out at all. White completed the book in 1937, but declined to publish it until 1949,

when an editor paid him a visit, sat on his sofa, found it uncomfortable, and fished from under the cushion the abandoned manuscript. He prevailed on White to let him publish it, and the book came out in 1951. In the United States, it eventually went out of print, and, for decades, it was difficult to find. In 2007, New York Review Books remedied that situation by bringing out an edition that preserves White’s many drawings of hawk paraphernalia (part of the attraction of hawking, one suspects, was all the time spent with leather and knots) and adds an introduction by Marie Winn, best known for chronicling the life of the red-tailed hawk Pale Male and its mate.

Unlike Macdonald, White had no idea what he was doing when he acquired his goshawk. “I had never trained a serious hawk before, nor met a living falconer, nor seen a hawk that had been trained,” he wrote. “I had three books.” The one he relied on most was written in 1619. It was a bad guide, White was a bad student, and, as for the hawk, before its training was done it broke its tether and flew away. I won’t reveal what became of it, but White’s book goes slack at that point, its own line broken as well.

Until that moment, however, “The Goshawk” is tremendous. White has both a keen eye and a supple, surprising mind, and his observations of the natural world often lend a comic



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## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

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pleasure to an otherwise dark book. A hawk that has killed a mouse “rose leisurely over the hedge, carrying the body as a city worker carried his attaché case.” Watching his hawk hunt, a falconer grows so involved that “it was like being an onlooker at an athletic meeting who kicks to help the high-jumper.” After a passage about a hawk chasing a rabbit, White, wonderfully at ease on the page, appends these instructions: “You must read it at the top of your voice, in three seconds, and you will see what it was.”

For a slim book, “The Goshawk” has, like its subject, a formidable wingspan. It is not quite right to call it a draft of “The Once and Future King,” but it is something close to a précis of the later book’s themes: it is about educational systems, political systems, medieval history, desire, violence, control of others, and control of self. These last two, in particular, dominate the work, and Macdonald’s take is the right one. “White made falconry a metaphysical battle,” she writes. “Like *Moby-Dick* or *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Goshawk* was a literary encounter between animal and man that reached back to Puritan traditions of spiritual contest.” In keeping with that tradition, what was at stake for White in austringing was not his hawk but his soul. It is the prerogative of hawks to draw blood without sin. If White could master the bird, he seemed to believe, he could at once master and vicariously enjoy his own violent urges.

This struggle gives “The Goshawk” its stakes, but it also makes the book almost unbearably disturbing. In attempting to identify with the hawk, White only makes it subject to his self-loathing. He names the bird Gos but calls it terrible things: frightening, repulsive, dangerous, hysterical, baleful, a monster, a savage, a snake, murderous as Caligula—as Attila, as Odin, as Death. “It was like being handcuffed to a moron, I would think bitterly, in a chain gang”; or it was like sharing his home with “a homicidal maniac.” That line might more reasonably have been written by the bird. White describes his yearning to wring its neck, bash its head into a gatepost, and subject it to “the extreme torture it deserved.”

All this is made more painful by the fact that White also genuinely loves the hawk, and hates himself. He writes, with delight, of Gos taking his first bath, getting his first case of hiccups, first coming from afar to the fist. The book would not be half so hard to read if it were not half-time tender. But tenderness is not an attitude that a man so deprived of affection can sustain. Once, when the bird won’t stop bating, White flies into a rage and, in violation of the first commandment of hawking, deliberately thwarts its effort to climb back up on his fist, forcing it to remain dangling upside down in helpless terror. Afterward, Gos seems stunned into quiescence, and White “stood dumbstruck also, mobbed by most of the deadly sins.” The war poet Siegfried Sassoon, who had reason to recognize the rage, shame, denial, and self-justification attendant upon acts of violence, could not finish “The Goshawk.” “I now flinch from anything frightful,” he wrote, “and what I read was agonizing.”

Of all the falconry words we learn from Macdonald, the most potent one to appear in “The Goshawk” is “manning.” It means to get a bird accustomed to being around people, but there’s no escaping its connotations. Macdonald is unmanned, in her way—without a father, without a partner, cut off from what we used to call mankind—but, when White uses it, the word takes on darker tones. To man something is to control it, as one mans a ship. It is also, implicitly, to assert physical and sexual power. White knew that by contemporary standards he was unmanned; he also knew the extent of his desire to exercise control over others. He despised both aspects of himself, and spent his life fighting them. But a captive hawk that escapes will eventually become entangled in its jesses, and White, attempting to free himself, found instead that he was caught up in everything that he hated. To escape the human world, he made a wild animal captive to it; to exorcise his violence, he turned it against an innocent creature. Despite himself, White winds up treating Gos quite as his parents had treated him: with cruelty, caprice, and fatal neglect.

Like “The Once and Future King,” “The Goshawk” is many kinds of tale—a

comedy, a romance, a farce—but, in the end, unmistakably, it is a tragedy. Tragedies, in the literary sense of the word, do not happen to terrible people; they happen to decent people, terribly flawed. White, on the page, is sensitive, funny, highly learned, with a demanding moral compass and a spectacular mind. Neither homicidal nor maniacal, he is more like the friend so troubled that no one can save him. “For the first time in my life, I was absolutely free,” he writes, upon moving to the cabin and acquiring Gos. And then, with the terrified bird newly tethered and locked in his barn: “I was as free as a hawk.”

Toward the end of “H Is for Hawk,” Macdonald recounts a story first recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the mid-twelfth century. Once upon a time, the story goes, there was a Welsh king who fought a terrible battle and, in the course of it, lost many close friends. Grief-stricken, he fled to the forest, where he lived “like a wild animal . . . forgetful of himself and of his kindred.” That Welsh king was Merlyn. Eventually, he emerged, but the impulse of the anguished to flee into nature would persist across the centuries. “Earth hath no sorrows,” John Muir once wrote, “that earth cannot heal.” If that is a cure, it is homeopathic; for the desolate and lonely, only wilderness and solitude.

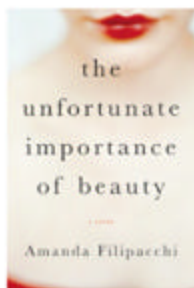
Figuratively speaking, White never found his way out of the woods. He moved from place to place, evaded his taxes, evaded a lot of things. He wrote some twenty-odd books but is remembered today mostly for “The Once and Future King,” in which he hid himself occasionally as Arthur, more often as Merlyn, but above all as Lancelot, the ill-made knight who was for a time the best in the world at his craft yet carried within him a shame so old and deep that he could not even name it. In the end, the legend holds, Lancelot goes to live in penitence in a hermitage, while the king, mortally wounded, is set adrift on a ship—to one day rise again. White died at the age of fifty-seven, on a boat in the Aegean Sea. “I expect to make rather a good death,” he’d written two years earlier. “The essence of death is loneliness, and I have had plenty of practice at this.”



Macdonald's story has a different ending. One day, crouching over a rabbit she has just killed, feeling like "an executioner after a thousand deaths," she comes to see that she has been travelling with her hawk not further from grief but further from life. Scared by her own numbness and darkness, she begins to seek help: from loving relatives, attentive friends, modern psychopharmacology—all the advantages she had that White did not. Slowly, her grief starts to lift. As it does, she finds that she disagrees with Merlyn and Muir. "The wild is not a panacea for the human soul," she writes. "Too much in the air can corrode it to nothing." All along, she had wanted to be her hawk: fierce, solitary, inhuman. Instead, she now realizes, "I was the figure standing underneath the tree at nightfall, collar upturned against the damp, waiting patiently for the hawk to return." Her father, she knows, will never rejoin the human world. But she can. Like a figure in a myth who followed a hawk to the land of the dead, Macdonald turns around and comes home.

There is a precedent for this. After Merlyn finds the Wart in the woods, he catches the wayward goshawk, then accompanies the boy back home and becomes his tutor. His is an odd sort of schooling, consisting mostly of indirect ethics lessons accomplished by turning the boy into various animals: a perch, an ant, a badger. The Wart regards this as a huge improvement over logic and Latin, and one evening, when he is desperately bored, he goes to Merlyn and begs for another lesson. Perhaps, he suggests, he could be turned into a hawk.

To want to be a hawk: "That is pretty ambitious," Merlyn observes. Eventually, he will grant the request, and the goshawk that the Wart followed into the woods will try to kill him. But, for now, the magician puts his student off. "You shall be everything in the world, animal, vegetable, mineral, protista or virus, for all I care—before I have done with you," he tells the boy. But, he continues, the time has not yet come to try to be a hawk. And so, he says, "you may as well sit down for the moment and learn to be a human being." ♦

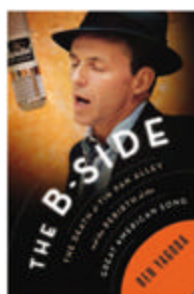


## BRIEFLY NOTED

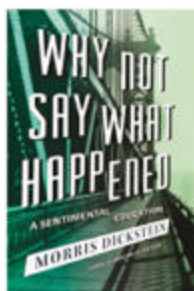
**THE UNFORTUNATE IMPORTANCE OF BEAUTY**, by Amanda Filipacchi (Norton). Barb Colby, a costume designer in Manhattan, is gorgeous, but finds her looks a hindrance: people respond to her face, not her spirit. After her best friend leaps to his death, confessing love for her in a suicide note, she constructs an elaborate disguise, including "a simple-but-convincing jiggling fat suit," a frizzy gray wig, and crooked fake teeth. Meanwhile, another friend, a brilliant but plain musician, falls in love with a handsome cad, raising alarm among the members of their close-knit, artsy circle. A caper involving a murder plot ensues. Filipacchi works with clear themes, but her sure comic touch steers clear of didacticism; smart and sweet, the novel becomes a tribute to the pleasures of friendship.



**ETTA AND OTTO AND RUSSELL AND JAMES**, by Emma Hooper (Simon & Schuster). "I've gone," Etta writes to her husband, Otto, at the beginning of this fairy-tale-like novel. In her eighties and slowly losing her memory, she sets out on foot to the ocean, which she has never seen. "I will try to remember to come back," she says. The novel follows Etta as she treks through the Canadian prairies (accompanied by a talking coyote) and Otto as he learns to live alone. Hooper's language is spare and repetitive, at times to a fault, and her characters' motives often remain elusive. But what emerges is a delicate hymn to the natural landscape and an elegy to a dwindling generation.



**THE B-SIDE**, by Ben Yagoda (Riverhead). In 1957, Frank Sinatra, lamenting the displacement of his beloved standards, dismissed rock and roll as being "sung, played and written for the most part by cretinous goons." Yet, as Ben Yagoda writes in this spirited history of American popular music, the first golden age of songwriting was already over by the time anyone was rocking around the clock. Changes in music distribution and in public taste had unleashed, instead, "novelty numbers, lachrymose ballads, simplistic jingles, hillbilly hokum." Pointing toward the renaissance of songwriting in the sixties, Yagoda argues that rock did not mark the end of the Great American Songbook but was, at its best, a spiritual heir and second coming.



**WHY NOT SAY WHAT HAPPENED**, by Morris Dickstein (Liveright). This memoir by a noted literary critic and cultural historian charts his journey from Lower East Side yeshiva boy to cosmopolitan professor. Much of the book is a love ballad to his heady university years at Columbia, Cambridge, and Yale, chronicling a series of significant encounters with, among others, Lionel Trilling, F. R. Leavis, and Harold Bloom. Though an old-fashioned humanist like his mentors, Dickstein reveals himself to be in synch with his time. His enthusiasms are widely dispersed (movies and popular music no less than the Western canon), and he describes the emergence of radical culture in New York in the sixties with sympathy. Conjuring a lost age of intellect, Dickstein proves the most cheerful of elegists.

ON TELEVISION

# HOME COOKING

*Funny families on “Fresh Off the Boat” and “Black-ish.”*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



Like many pioneering TV series, ABC’s “Fresh Off the Boat,” a sitcom about a Taiwanese-American family running a Western-themed chophouse in Orlando, Florida, debuted to impossibly high expectations, hand-wringing, and prickly waves of preemptive backlash. In an unusual twist, this hazing came from the man whose life the show was based on.

In an essay in *New York*, Eddie Huang, the celebrity chef, Vice TV host, and author of the memoir “Fresh Off the Boat,” merrily trash-talked his own collaborators, including a Chinese-American producer, whom he called an “Uncle Chan,” and the showrunner, Nahnatchka Khan,

an Iranian-American. “What did you buy my book for?” Huang yelled, frustrated that the show had bowdlerized his story, which included whippings by his father, an immigrant restaurant owner. “Just make *A Chink’s Life . . . With Free Wonton Soup or Soda.*” Thousands of words in, Huang tossed out a few lines of praise, but the impression he left wasn’t great—if he saw his sitcom as a sellout, who were viewers to disagree?

At the heart of this rant was the question of what makes TV bold: Huang wanted something pungent, like an FX anti-hero dramedy, or like the nineties sitcom “Married with Children,” the type of show that would underline (and

maybe glamorize) his violent youth, his charismatic dick of a dad, and the roots of Huang’s own flamboyant persona. That desire wasn’t sheerly egotistical: Huang was eager to push back at the cliché of Asian men as passive, genitally cheated nerds (“the eunuch who can count,” as he puts it in the book)—a Long Duk Dong stereotype still visible on shows like CBS’s “2 Broke Girls.” Huang wanted “Fresh Off the Boat” to “go hard,” like his nineties hip-hop heroes. In the process, he was claiming TV’s own bad-boy role, the provocateur who shoves authenticity down the throat of The Man. Think Roseanne; think Louis C.K. and Dave Chappelle.

In reality, of course, the bad-boy provocateur very rarely gets final cut on a network family sitcom—it’s a genre more prone to compromise than a Senate bill. Even the edgiest shows have limits: Al Bundy never hit Peggy, after all. So it’s no surprise that, aesthetically, “Fresh Off the Boat” fits right into ABC’s sweet-tempered slate of comedies, which includes the subtly retrograde “Modern Family,” the wonderful “The Middle,” “The Goldbergs,” “Black-ish”—a smart new show that I’ll get to in a moment—and the unfortunately bland “Cristela.” Like all these shows, “Fresh Off the Boat” is brightly lit, with an A plot and a B plot. The jokes aren’t dirty and nobody gets his butt whipped. The parents—patriotic restaurant-manager dad, Louis (Randall Park), and proudly alienated mom, Jessica (the terrific Constance Wu)—love one another. There’s even a “Wonder Years”-esque voice-over, performed by Huang, and an ensemble of adorable children. It’s a comedy the whole family can watch together—which may be either an insult or a compliment, but is definitely a business plan.

Yet, even in its half-dozen early episodes, those burnt first pancakes of sitcoms, the show has a radical quality, simply because it arrives in a television landscape with few Asian characters, almost none of them protagonists. Khan, the showrunner (who wrote for Seth MacFarlane, and who produced the wicked ABC sitcom “Don’t Trust the B—— in Apartment 23”), is her own sort of provocateur, an expert at slipping rude ideas into polite formats. She uses the Asian-American family to reset TV’s

*If “Fresh Off the Boat” emphasizes family warmth, it’s complicated by sharp details.*



defaults. The characters aren't the hero's best friends; they're not macho cartoons or eye candy, either, as on some cable dramas I could name. This can be an unpleasantly clinical way to talk: it places the critic in the camp of the bean counters, not the gonzo rapscallions. But simply watching people of color having a private conversation, one that's not primarily about white people, is a huge deal. It changes who the joke is on. "Fresh Off the Boat" is part of a larger movement within television, on shows that include the CW's "Jane the Virgin" and Fox's "Empire"—a trend that's most influential when it creates a hit, not a niche phenomenon.

Reading the book, then watching the show, you get why Huang was frustrated: without a cruel bully for a father, Eddie's taste for hip-hop feels more superficial—in the book, it's an abused kid's catharsis and an identification with black history. But, if the show emphasizes family warmth, that theme is complicated by sharp sociological details: the only black kid in the school calls Eddie a "Chink" and smirks at his hip-hop T-shirt; Jessica grabs every free sample at the supermarket, then gives the employee a hilariously dismissive wave; Louis hires a white host to attract customers ("A nice happy white face, like Bill Pullman," he explains firmly). There's no violence, but there are specific immigrant perspectives, shown through multiple lenses.

In one of Khan's most effective gambits, we see Eddie through his mother's eyes as often as we see her through his. In the book, Jessica is a brazen, mysterious goad to her son; on the show, she's a full character, Eddie's equal in cultural alienation, even if her escape is Stephen King, not the Notorious B.I.G. In one of the most interesting early episodes, mother and son are both drawn to Honey, a trophy wife who lives next door. Eddie sees a hot MILF he can show off to the boys; Jessica sees a kindred spirit who will eat her "stinky tofu" and bond over "Dolores Claiborne"—then pulls away when she realizes that Honey is the town home-wrecker. The show hits every awkward angle of this triangle, including a surreal fantasy sequence in which Eddie, inspired by his hero Ol' Dirty Bastard, sprays Capri Sun on gyrating video vixens. (His mom intrudes, complaining

that he's wasting juice, while his father offers the women free samples from the restaurant: "Come on, Fly Girls. Try a rib! Tell a friend.")

In the final scene, at a block party, everyone's loneliness collides, as Eddie gropes Honey, and Jessica sees her neighbor's humiliation. Opening her heart to a fellow-outsider, Jessica seizes the karaoke mike to serenade Honey with an awkward, earnest rendition of "I Will Always Love You." The sequence doesn't "go hard"; it goes soft, quite deliberately. But somehow it still manages to find strangeness within its sentimentality. "Fresh Off the Boat" is unlikely to dismantle the master's house. But it opens a door.

**A**BC's other new family sitcom, "Black-ish," created by Kenya Barris and Larry Wilmore (who left to do "The Nightly Show," on Comedy Central), has had fifteen episodes, giving it more of a chance to grow than "Fresh Off the Boat"—and in that time the series has transformed from hokey formula into one of the goofiest, most reliably enjoyable comedies around. Early on, the show kept aggressively re-stating its thesis: Andre (Dre), a successful adman, is worried that his four kids aren't black enough. Growing up rich in a white suburb, they don't remember a time before Obama; Andre Junior is a nerd, not a thug. Andre's biracial wife, Rainbow, an anesthesiologist, is less concerned about race. Each week, Dre tries to toughen the kids up, terrified that if they don't get "blacker" he'll have failed as a father.

The problem with the show, initially, was that Andre himself felt so off-putting—childlike and abrasive, a man-baby in the Homer Simpson mode—that it was hard to buy his marriage or his success, let alone his lessons. Rainbow, played by the fantastic Tracee Ellis Ross, was trapped in the gruesome role of wife-as-mommy, the sighing goody-goody. It's hard to even remember that version, though, because, once "Black-ish" settled in, it began, like so many smart sitcoms, a quiet reinvention. Andre got more insightful; Rainbow became a glamorous dork with a temper and her own loose-limbed charisma; the kids clicked, too; and Andre's workplace became a reliably hilarious set-

ting for him to brainstorm about his troubles. It helped that he began to acknowledge his own outsized personality, too, rather than presenting it as interchangeable with authentic urban blackness. "I'm a lot," Andre says, about his parenting. "If they can get past me, they can get past anything."

A funny Valentine's Day episode featured a date night that went downhill—a sitcom chestnut that paid off, miraculously, owing to sharp dialogue and the couple's great chemistry. Andre and Rainbow sniped over his mispronouncing the word as "Valentines." They revisited a childbirth scenario so awkward that the doctor asked her, "You mean he's actually part of your life? Because plenty of women successfully raise children alone." They argued over whether or not Andre saw Gene Hackman at a roller rink. ("You think everyone is Gene Hackman!" Rainbow fumes.) In the best tradition of the mainstream sitcom, the show felt both new and familiar, giving the show's marriage emotional roots.

As these relationships became more organic, "Black-ish" also got looser with its ethnic humor, with plots about Andre competing to be a black Santa Claus (he loses out to a Mexican woman) and microaggressions on a baseball field. When Rainbow notices a gray pubic hair, Andre tells her, "You look distinguished, going all Frederick Douglass down there." When their daughter dates a French boy, a co-worker of Andre's says, "I cheated on my husband with a French-Canadian. His Frenchness was so powerful that I forgot he was Canadian." Andre's mother tells Rainbow, "You are too hard on the kids. If I didn't know you were mixed, I'd swear you were Chinese."

In the show's most outrageous episode, a ski trip becomes an outlandish parody of Martin Luther King Day. Rainbow throws sardonic air quotes onto "Doctor," because King had no medical degree; Andre Junior admits that he's never fully absorbed King's "I Have a Dream" speech, because "I always kind of zone out when people start to tell me about their dreams." The jokes overlapped, turning flippant, wild, verging on misfire—an elbow in the ribs of boomer earnestness. In a safe sitcom structure, it was a different kind of risk: inside jokes in an outside voice. ♦

## BOYS IN THE BAND

*A musical about the Founding Fathers.*

BY HILTON ALS



There is so much good will and enthusiasm these days among theatre-goers who have seen Lin-Manuel Miranda's complicated, valuable musical "Hamilton" (directed by Thomas Kail, at the Public) that introducing anything less into the conversation makes one feel rather like Debbie Downer at a buoyant fête. But a critical take on Miranda's work—which does everything it can to stand outside the American-musical canon and then doesn't—should only add to the production's gold-star success, since nothing succeeds like controversy.

Alexander Hamilton knew from discord. Born in Nevis, in 1755, he had a childhood marked by waste and brutality. At sixteen, his mother, Rachel Faucette,

the daughter of an Englishwoman and a Frenchman, inherited her father's Nevis plantation and was married off, to Johann Michael Lavien, an older Danish man in St. Croix, who had aspirations to be a planter. When she ran away from the marriage and their child, her husband had her locked up for several months. After her release, Rachel fled to St. Kitts, where she met James Hamilton, a Scot, who, having failed to distinguish himself at home, had come to seek his fortune in the land-rich West Indies. Eventually, Rachel took James to Nevis, where Alexander, their second son, was born. Because she'd never divorced Lavien, Alexander was considered illegitimate, a stigma that haunted him for the rest of his life, along with the myth

that he was part black (which, as Ron Chernow writes, in "Alexander Hamilton," his juicy 2004 biography, "probably arose from the incontestable truth that many, if not most, illegitimate children in the West Indies bore mixed blood").

By the time Hamilton was a teen-ager, he had no parents at all. James had deserted the family, and Rachel had died of a fever. Lavien, still her legal husband, claimed her estate for their son, leaving the two Hamilton boys, whom he called "whore-children," penniless. Hamilton, then in St. Croix, found work as a clerk and a slave inspector, and it was there that he had his first stroke of luck, precipitated, of course, by a disaster. In August, 1772, a hurricane blew through the Virgin Islands, wiping out homes, property, and people. A vivid letter that Hamilton wrote about the catastrophe found its way into a newspaper and impressed a local clergyman, who, with Hamilton's employers, arranged his passage to New York, where it was hoped that he would study medicine and then return home to minister to his people. But, once Hamilton boarded that ship, he never went back.

Knowing all this can only increase your admiration for Miranda's ability to synthesize so much information in his big, breathing script. "Hamilton" is a one-set play. The wooden stage has been stained a light brown that suggests, at first, the beaches of Nevis, then the deck of the ship that carries Hamilton to New York, and, finally, the ground where he spends his final moments. Around the stage is a gallery hung with ropes and other maritime paraphernalia; the actors and a small troupe of precise, lively dancers use staircases to make quick entrances and exits. (Designed by David Korins and lit by Howell Binkley, the *mise en scène* makes Hamilton's world believable.)

First entrance: the Founding Fathers Aaron Burr (Leslie Odom, Jr.) and Thomas Jefferson (Daveed Diggs), along with George Washington's aide-de-camp John Laurens (Anthony Ramos), Hamilton (Miranda), and the rest of the company, in eighteenth-century-style knee britches and waistcoats. Staring out at the audience, Burr rap-sings resentfully, "How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in

*Blood brothers: Leslie Odom, Jr., and Lin-Manuel Miranda in "Hamilton."*



squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?" Laurens answers:

The ten-dollar Founding Father without  
a father  
Got a lot farther by working a lot harder  
By being a lot smarter  
By being a self-starter  
By fourteen, they placed him in charge of  
a trading charter

Miranda introduces his characters with a child's wonder but a father's authority; you can feel him standing at the edge of the game he's created, a historical world he has remade in his image, starting with color-blind casting that evokes Joseph Papp, the founder of the Public, who instituted the practice downtown. Burr is played by a black actor, and Miranda is of Puerto Rican descent. Part of what the audience members delight in—what makes them feel so high and intelligent as they watch the show—is the fact that they're in on this fabulous joke. Here is a *boricua* actor—whose Puerto Rican brethren, with their Spanish, African, white, and Carib Indian roots, are American citizens but cannot vote in national elections—playing a white slave inspector turned abolitionist and politician, who was born on an island less than three hundred miles from his own parents' birthplace. Who could be better for the role? Especially given Miranda's Hamilton-like industriousness and skill. (As Hamilton and another character intone, "Immigrants . . . we get the job done.")

It is 1776, and America is struggling for independence from King George III (the take-no-prisoners Brian d'Arcy James, whose King looks on his subjects' desire for freedom as a nonsensical annoyance). Hamilton runs into Burr on a New York City sidewalk. He is all star-struck enthusiasm: like Burr, he wanted to go to Princeton, he gushes, but he made the mistake of punching out the bursar. Burr invites him into a tavern and offers him this advice:

BURR: Talk less.  
HAMILTON: What?  
BURR: Smile more.  
HAMILTON: Hah.  
BURR: Don't let them know what you're  
against or what you're for.  
HAMILTON: You can't be serious.  
BURR: You wanna get ahead?  
HAMILTON: Yes.  
BURR: Fools who run their mouths off  
wind up dead.

This, incredibly, is what colored elders used to tell children: never let the

white world know what you feel, let alone think; your vulnerability could be your death. By having actors of color issue this warning while impersonating historical white men, Miranda makes us stop and consider: What are we looking at? Something new and unrecognizable on the stage—a dramatic successor to Derek Walcott's and Jamaica Kincaid's literary explorations of the surreality of colonialism.

In the tavern, Hamilton meets three other ambitious young dudes: Laurens, the Marquis de Lafayette (Diggs), and Hercules Mulligan (Okieriete Onaodowan), who will become George Washington's chief confidential agent during the Revolutionary War. For now, though, these men are a bunch of Testosterone Tommies, hanging out, drinking ale, showing off:

LAURENS: I'm John Laurens in the place  
to be!  
Two pints o' Sam Adams, but I'm  
workin' on three, uh!  
Those Redcoats don't want it with me!  
Cuz I will pop chicka pop these cops till  
I'm free!

LAFAYETTE: *Oui, oui, mon ami. Je  
m'appelle Lafayette!*  
The Lancelot of the revolutionary set!  
I came from afar just to say *bonsoir!*  
Tell the King, *Casse-toi!* Who's the best?  
*C'est moi! . . .*

HAMILTON: I probly shouldn't brag, but  
dag, I amaze and astonish  
The problem is I got a lot of brains but no  
polish  
I gotta holler just to be heard  
And with every word, I drop knowledge!  
I'm a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece  
of coal  
Tryin' to reach my goal.

Miranda will not be limited by form, and "Hamilton" feels, at times, less like a musical than like an opera—an amalgamation of dance, speech, music, and storytelling. There's another tradition at work here, too, a colored literary tradition that started with Sterling A. Brown's thirties sound poems about the black experience and continues today in the work of poets like Claudia Rankine, whose rhythms are inseparable from the communal injury and triumph, and in rap, which began as a black-male art form. Indeed, part of what makes people feel so jumpy and excited during "Hamilton" is its unbridled masculinity. (This was why the 2010 musical "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" was a cult hit: in it, the seventh President of the United States is a lawless boy.) Miranda's men aren't doing the usual "gay"

work of the musical, which is to say singing about their feelings (at least, not at first); they're guys in a circle jerk, and the lube is ambition, chicks, and power.

But once Hamilton works his way into Washington's inner circle, becomes the Treasury Secretary, and meets his future wife, the rich and socially prominent Eliza Schuyler (played by the genteel and thus dull Phillipa Soo), the show's radicalism is slowly drained, and the resulting corpse is a conventional musical love story. As in David Byrne's 2013 spectacle about Imelda Marcos, "Here Lies Love," politics, in the later scenes of Miranda's work, is just another backdrop to the standard narrative of a man being undone by a lady.

In 1789, a woman in distress named Maria Reynolds (the wonderful Jasmine Cephas Jones) shows up at Hamilton's home. Her husband has treated her badly, and she has no money. How can she fail to remind Hamilton of the forsaken Rachel? In a way, by getting involved with Reynolds, he returns to his past, to the mother who died too soon and could not fully mother him. Reynolds's desperation is not grating or awful; it's a force of nature, and Jones conveys it with real understanding. But Miranda keeps her mainly in the background. He doesn't have much feeling for his female characters; for the most part, they're plot points in silk. ("Hamilton" has an almost all-male production team.) This was also a problem with Miranda's Tony-winning 2008 show "In the Heights," which centered on his alter ego, Usnavi: the other characters, all too "colorful" by half, were just fleeting stars in his galaxy. "Hamilton" is the work of a more mature artist, for sure, but one who's fearful of being kept out of the white boys' club of the American musical. By burying his trickster-quick take on race, immigrant ambition, colonialism, and masculinity under a commonplace love story in the second half of the show, Miranda hides what he most needs to display: his talent.

The most meaningful love story in "Hamilton" is revealed at the end of the play, when Burr, by then the Vice-President of the United States, mortally wounds the man who once longed for his acceptance. As Burr points his gun, there's a real look of loss in Hamilton's eyes. That regret is not so much for his own life or for the love of his family but for the treasured competition and camaraderie of his and Burr's bromance. ♦

## LOST SOULS

*"Maps to the Stars" and "71."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



*Julianne Moore and Mia Wasikowska star in David Cronenberg's new film.*

The new David Cronenberg movie, "Maps to the Stars," takes place in Los Angeles. Some of it was filmed there, too—the first occasion on which the director, who seldom roams beyond his own back yard of Canada, has shot a movie in the United States. One scene unfolds on Rodeo Drive, outside a clothing store where a character has just spent eighteen thousand dollars. The sight of Cronenberg and his crew setting up there, in broad daylight, must have seemed not merely unsettling but, to any Hollywood residents who were passing by, downright unhealthy. I'm surprised they didn't call the cops or, better yet, an epidemiologist. When the guy who made "Rabid" and "The Fly" turns up in town, there's no accounting for the damage he might see, or show, or do.

The woman with the fancy clothes is Havana Segrand (Julianne Moore), an actress who, if not washed up, is drifting in with the tide. She had a famous mother named Clarice Taggart (Sarah Gadon), also an actress, who died in a conflagration and now keeps appearing, youthful and uncharred, before Havana's eyes—in the bathtub, say, or on the

massage table. This begs for therapy, which in Havana's case means stripping to her underwear and submitting to Stafford Weiss (John Cusack), a shamanistic shrink who will rub away your painful memories as if they were spasms of lumbago. Havana's sex life comprises a desultory threesome and a quickie in the back seat of a car. What she truly desires is a new personal assistant—or "chore whore," to use her fragrant term. A contender arrives, in the shape of Agatha (Mia Wasikowska), who comes recommended by Carrie Fisher ("I met her on Twitter"). Agatha wears long black gloves, which conceal scars from a house fire. She gets the job.

All this lies within scorching distance of parody: an occupational hazard, as Nathanael West realized, for anyone facing up to Hollywood. Overkill comes with the territory. That is why "Sunset Boulevard" begins with a corpse, bobbing in a pool, and proceeds to an old dame who keeps a stuffed ape in a casket, and that is why Cronenberg introduces us to the delightful Benjie (Evan Bird), the star of the hit comedy "Bad Babysitter," who is fresh out of rehab and calls his agent a

"Jew faggot." Benjie is thirteen. "Three hundred thousand a week—I was nine years old. How psychotic is that?" he says. Cronenberg-watchers will twitch with anticipation; he has always been drawn to the smell of psychosis, like a wasp to a picnic.

The mood at the start is thick not with mystery, as in David Lynch's "Mulholland Drive," but with exasperation, as we struggle to work out who is related—or helplessly clamped—to whom. Hence the recurring theme of incest, which is another kind of parody: the heinous contortion of romantic love. Agatha announces that her parents were brother and sister, and she herself is reunited, under intense conditions, with a long-lost sibling. As for Havana, she pitches aggressively for a role first played by her late mother (who at one point appears naked in her bed). She loses the part and howls like Antigone, then gets it back—because her rival has suffered a death in the family—and skips around, chanting, like a little girl. Throughout this near-insanity, Cronenberg keeps his cool, to the brink of refrigeration. In terms of camera movements, he is the king of underkill. When Stafford, the self-help guru who cannot help himself, thumps a defenseless woman and slings her out of the house, we crawl stealthily in her wake, toward the open door.

Why, then, does "Maps to the Stars" fail to compel as it should? In part, I think, because Viggo Mortensen has spoiled us. His great performances for Cronenberg, in "A History of Violence" and "Eastern Promises," reminded us that the director is at his strongest when he has a hero to haul us through whatever nightmare has been laid on. That was true of James Woods in "Videodrome" and Jeremy Irons in "Dead Ringers," both of them masterly figures who seemed nonetheless at the mercy of instinctual drives, whereas someone like Havana is less well poised; she is the dupe of her foolish appetites, and that's that. Moore holds nothing back, and the result makes a splendidly noisy companion piece to her Oscar-winning turn in "Still Alice," but Havana, on her own, can't hold the story together. I wanted more both of Cusack, who is genuinely frightening, with his heavy tread, his black garb, and his clown-white face, and of Robert Pattinson,



who plays a chauffeur named Jerome Fontana—a downgrade from his lead role in Cronenberg’s “Cosmopolis,” where he lounged in the back of a limo. Why not have Jerome, a ready-jaded hopeful, steer us into Hollywood’s dark vales?

There is another issue here. According to Cronenberg, the script for “Maps to the Stars,” by Bruce Wagner, began life more than twenty years ago, and it shows. When Jerome says to Agatha that he’s thinking of converting to Scientology, “just as a career move,” it’s a nice line, but it’s also a reboot of a joke in Robert Altman’s “The Player,” where a studio executive goes to A.A. not because he has a drink problem but because “that’s where all the deals are being made these days.” Doubtless, Wagner’s work has been through many morphings and refinements, yet there remains a nagging sense that the finished film lags behind the times. The truth is that, in 2015, Havana would be lucky to play a second-string intergalactic queen for Marvel, and Benjie’s agent would already be positioning him as the Spider-Man of 2020.

As a portrait of the movie industry, “Maps to the Stars” pales beside the fire of a film like Robert Aldrich’s “The Big Knife,” from sixty years ago, which had everything: a Clifford Odets screenplay you could sear yourself on, Jack Palance in his tortured prime, and, as the studio boss, Rod Steiger, with his silk-soft croon and a startling thatch of bright hair. (So *that’s* where Javier Bardem sprang from in “Skyfall.”) Cronenberg, bereft of Aldrich’s will to attack, is more surgeon than satirist. We go to his work

not for digs and jibes but for steady incisions into the ills of the flesh, or the pains of the spirit, and “Maps to the Stars” is at its most potent and beautiful by far when it becomes a ghost story—when the departed, not just Havana’s mother, return to quiz the living. That makes an ideal twist for Hollywood, a place both besotted with and dismissive of its past. More important, these spectral scenes suggest new ground for Cronenberg. He went there, fleetingly, in “The Dead Zone.” Time for another visit.

If a movie bears the title “’71,” and if the director is called Yann Demange, your best guess would be that the film is set in the Paris Commune of 1871. And you’d be wrong. The time is a century later, and we are in Belfast, another city besieged by its rancors and splits. British troops are on the streets. A new recruit, Private Gary Hook (Jack O’Connell), no sooner arrives than he is dropped into a crisis for which, despite his training, he is unprepared. His platoon is sent to accompany the Royal Ulster Constabulary on a house-to-house search near the dividing line between Catholic and Protestant districts. Scuffles flare into a riot, one soldier is shot, and the rest of them withdraw—minus Hook, who is stranded in hostile territory, although, by the look on his dazed young face, he could be stuck on another planet.

He is not the first such refugee, harried and alone. In “Odd Man Out” (the film that Carol Reed made in 1947, two years before “The Third Man”), James Mason is also on the run in Belfast. His

character is an I.R.A. man, the mirror image of Hook, but they share a plight, and their desperation is crosshatched by the shadows of the town through which they creep. It would be too much to say, of either director, that the politics are an excuse for the style, but you should certainly not turn to “’71” for an enriched understanding of the Troubles, as they are still known. The director is much too excited by undercover operations in the military, and by tangled infighting among the Republicans, to bother with the facts on the surface, and Hook’s platoon seems to float ridiculously free, adrift from a chain of command. Such is the plot’s momentum, however, that we scarcely notice the jolts of implausibility. As the camera darts down alleyways, or prowls the housing projects where soldiers fear to tread, what really concerns Demange—and what lends such a kick to O’Connell’s performance, on the heels of “Starred Up” and “Unbroken”—is the bewilderment and the panic that await us, whoever we may be, in limbo. Best of all, oddly, are the kids: first, Hook’s little brother back in England, who worships him, and with whom he plays soccer before he leaves; and, second, the gingery tyke, ominously wise for his years, who meets the wandering hero in Belfast and asks whether he is Catholic or Protestant. “I don’t know,” Hook says. “You don’t know? I’ve fuckin’ heard it all now,” the boy replies. In a rough, unlikely dream of a movie, that, at least, rings true. ♦

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, March 8th. The finalists in the February 16th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 23rd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"You did say you wanted an earlier flight."*  
Jeremy Schlosberg, Merion, Pa.



### THE FINALISTS

*"This town ain't big enough for anyone."*  
Ilan Moskowitz, Tenafly, N.J.

*"Are you sure he said high tide?"*  
Alison Green, New York City

*"This looks like a good place to set up camp."*  
Andrew Vuilleumier, New York City

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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(THE NEW YORK TIMES  
CRITICS' PICK)

(TIME OUT NEW YORK  
CRITICS' PICK)

(NEW YORK MAGAZINE  
CRITICS' PICK)

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Shot on iPhone 6

